

The Formation and Transformation of the Concept of the Modern “Individual”

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Abstract

This paper focuses on texts by the enlightenment group that actively introduced and accepted the concept of Western liberalism between 1895 and 1905, the year that when Korea began to lose its national sovereignty. Based on these texts, the paper explores how the concept of the “individual” that was represented in the as modern in Korean modernity was changed and transformed in each period, and examines the different meanings of this concept.

Of the terms that were most widely used at the time such as “people,” “commoners,” and the “self,” the term “people” was used as a general and abstract term; or as the only-sole object of enlightenment. But it was in fact the term “individual” that contained a substantial meaning. The rights of the individual essentially meant the rights to protect his or her own body and property. In Korea, the concept of a modern nation (gungmin) was unable to be born failed to appear, and after 1905 the term *minjok* officially took its place replaced this empty space. In the meantime, the birth of the concealed yet stable “individual” was lay behind these terms.

In this paper, the “individual” and “modern “people” are not seen as points

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along a linear [continuation-continuum](#) but are rather mutually exclusive. In the process of its formation and transformation, the notion of the individual does not necessarily conflict or is incompatible with the notion of state, but requires and constitutes the notion of state for the protection of the individual rights of life and property. Therefore, while the concepts of the individual and the people in the formation of Korean modernity did not always have an affinity for [each-one](#) another, the concepts of the individual and the state were not necessarily exclusive.

Keywords: modern Korea, modernity, individual, people, state, liberalism

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Memories of the “Modern” in Korea

As the French historian Pierre Nora states in his book, [Les Lieux de Mémoire](#), discourses regarding memory of past events increase around the time when that memory disappears. In this sense, it is possible to see the explosive interest in the “modern” and “modernity” in Korea from the 1990s until the present as a phenomenon arising from the crisis of identity experienced by Koreans feeling disconnected from their past and

leery [about of](#) the unknown future. The attempt to remember the “modern” seems to rise to the surface when the modern is disappearing.

The direction of memory is not linear. Remembering the vanishing modern can serve to restore basic foundations that used to be familiar; by remembering the ever-so-familiar modern in a strange and unfamiliar way it is also possible to create new foundations. In this context, the recent discourses on the modern reflect two opposite passions: _ nostalgia for tradition on the one hand and longing for the new on the other. If that is the case, why are Koreans trying to reorganize the modern that has already passed? What are they trying to remember, and how are they trying to remember it?

Through memory the past becomes a present gaze and acquires a present life. The past is always reconstructed by the present gaze. When considering the modern and the formation of modernity in Korea, most Koreans will refer to concepts such as “civilization,” “enlightenment,” “state,” and “nation” rather than “society” or [“the individual.”](#) Experiences such as the loss of national sovereignty and colonization¹ caused Koreans to remember the modern in the context of a nation or a state, and this has been the way by which Koreans think about their present. Why, then, do Koreans fail to recall such concepts as “society” and “individual” in the modern in Korea? Is it possible that these two concepts simply did not exist in the modern period? Or is it that the following generations made an effort to forget these concepts or perhaps were even unable to remember them?

The established theoretical research on the modern in Korea has created an almost single, collective memory of the “failure of nation-state building” as a result of

¹ However, the loss of national sovereignty did not hold the same significance for everyone in that period, and can therefore not be defined as an experience common to them.

the loss of national sovereignty. The loss of sovereignty contributed to the creation of an identity as a single *minjok* and *gungmin*² and the nostalgia for the lost country played the role of modern enlightenment in “developing” the state.

This paper is built on the premise that while during the period between 1894 and 1910 Korea was in the process of losing national sovereignty from the point of view of the “sphere of political society,” this period also witnessed an explosion in the publication of newspapers, journals, and bulletins through which public discourse was produced and disseminated and thus the “sphere of civil society” was actively formed. Furthermore, the formation of the concept of the modern “state,” as opposed to the traditional “commonwealth,” was possible through the spatial separation of state and society, that is, when the concept of a society which forms a state or that of a state which forms a society was presupposed.³ The modern state was distinguished from its previous form in that the concept of state was changed: the state no longer existed for a common purpose or for the community, but rather was there to respond to the interests of the social sphere and thus had actual power or power relationships.

² In this paper, the Western term “nation” was divided into *minjok* and *gungmin* in Korea. This is because in the process of the formation of Korean modernity the *minjok* and *gungmin* were not formed in a process similar to the one in which the Western modern nation-state was formed. After the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, when the political hegemony was transferred to Japan, the notion of *gungmin* could no longer be mentioned in the public sphere in Korea. In addition, the notion of *minjok* also appeared increasingly after 1905 because the *gungmin* in the modern ~~in~~ Korea failed to be born.

³ Even in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the terms “state” and “commonwealth” were interchangeable. The word “commonwealth” was derived from the word *commonweal*, originating from the Latin *res publica* meaning “public good.” The term “commonwealth” implied the communal association in pursuit of the public good, controlling both the religious and the secular. On the other hand, the term “state” originated from the *stato*, meaning the city-state of Italy, and was used after the mid-sixteenth century. In fact, the state, as an independent being separated from the religious, implied an entity that exercised power while maintaining order rather than promoting public good.

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This paper will examine how the concept of the “individual”⁴ was represented in the history of the formation of Korean modernity and what its significance was. This paper will not argue that the modern character of Korea was established centering ~~not~~ on the “state” but on on “society” rather than the “state” [this is a double negative – is the first “not” supposed to be there?]; the paper is also not trying to stress that the subject in the formation of Korean modernity was the “individual” rather than ~~not~~ the “nation” but the “individual.” Restoring what has been forgotten is of great importance, and many researchers in the fields of humanities, history, and sociology focus on Korea’s modern manners, ethos, and temper, thereby remembering and reviving many discourses surrounding the forgotten social sphere.

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The important point that this paper strives to make is that the modern experience of Korea and the collective memory regarding the modern cannot be explained only by the “nation” or the “state,” but rather they must be explained by taking into account the existence of the “individual” or “society” as the antithesis to the nation and the state. Furthermore, these concepts have been formed with their own characteristics within the close relations among them [대신 in concert with each other 어떨까요?]. This paper will indirectly display show that the character and form of the “state” in modern Korea

⁴ While the concept of the modern state in the West was formed in the mid-sixteenth century and became a general term in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the concept of the individual was discovered already during the period of the Roman Republic. The question of the “individual” became ~~a~~-universal ~~one~~ after the modern period, but the concept of the individual has deeper roots than other modern concepts. In Western thought, the origin of the individual as an independent being can be found in Cicero’s notion of the *individuum* during the Roman Republic period. In Cicero’s philosophy, the notion of “individuality” which cannot be explained in the context of community or “publicness” appeared alongside the notion of “publicness” that constructs a state. This notion appeared as the separation of public law and private law in the code of the early Roman Empire period. Cicero (1928, Book 2, XXV).

were closely related to the formation and development of the concept of the “individual,” and that complementary and conflicting relationships between the two concepts formed a unique “society-state.”

J. J. Rousseau points out that a modern subject is separated into *homme* and *citoyen*, and the German word *bürger* includes both the meanings of *bourgeois* and *citoyen*. As these two examples show, the process of the formation of ~~the~~ modernity in the West was not a single process and thus revealed the dual quality of “society” and ~~the~~ “citizen.” The following questions, then, must be raised: what is the significance of the individual as a subject of modern society? What characters did the “individual” acquire among the types of modern subjects ~~types~~—such as people, citizens, or bourgeoisie in the process of the formation of forming Korean modernity? Can the individual in Korean society be an autonomous, public subject?

In order to answer some of these questions, this paper focuses on texts by the enlightenment group and explores the formation and changes of the concept of the individual by examining: 1) texts written by an enlightenment thinker in 1895; 2) the *Dongnip sinmun* (The Independent) published between 1896 and 1899; 3) the significance of the relative vacuum of discourse between 1899 and 1905; and 4) textbooks such as the *Gukgahak* (Science of the State) and the *Jeongchihak* (Political Science) that were published more frequently after 1905 as the major texts used in state examinations.

Texts that represent the modern in Korea contain different contexts, and each text also contains a manifold of meanings according to different points of view. For example, *The Independent* (1896-1899) was published by Western-oriented enlightenment intellectuals; the *Hwangseong sinmun* (Imperial Capital News) (1898. 9.

5–1910. 8. 30) by nationalistic intellectuals; the *Mansebo* (Independence News) (1906. 6. 17–1907. 6. 30) by the Cheondogyo followers and members of the pro-Japanese Iljinhoe group; and the *Daehan maeil sinbo* (Korea Daily News) (1904. 7. 18–1910. 8. 30) founded by the British journalist Ernest Bethell and led by nationalistic reformists including Sin Chae-ho. These newspapers differ according to their publishers' inclination or their publication date. Their tone, character, and the use of concepts and meanings differ depending on the newspaper's chief editor.⁵ Therefore, even though the interpretation of history cannot be made on the basis of all texts of that time, it is impossible to generalize the discourses appearing in a particular media source as the modern discourses of that time.

This paper focuses on the writings of Yu Gil-jun as basic texts of the enlightenment group, *The Independent*, published under the initiative of Seo Jae-pil and Yun Chi-ho, and textbooks on political science written by Yu Gil-jun and others for two reasons: First, to examine how the characteristics of the concept of the individual appeared in the discourses of these intellectuals who were largely recognized as the propagators of enlightened liberalism. Second, while the *Korea Daily Newspaper*, published under the initiative of Sin Chae-ho, publicly emphasized the state, these texts were relatively liberal. Thus ~~the reason to use the texts were used to is to discover how~~ **the notion of the individual was connected to the discourses based on the notion of state and the idea of the state as an organism.**

By exploring how the concept of the “individual” was represented in texts where Western liberalism was most actively introduced and accepted, by examining how this

⁵ For a more detailed explanation regarding the main figures of each group or association, and promoters and leading powers of each publication, please refer to Choe (1997).

concept was changed and transformed according to different periods and texts, and by looking at how the concept came to be related to the concepts of “state” and “constitution,” this paper will show that the necessity of the state or the basis of constitutional order is not incompatible with the concept of the “individual” but is closely connected to it.

Of course, many different texts were written between 1894 and 1910, and much research should still be done on the comparison between different texts, their relationships, discords, and interactions. Studies remain to be done on the changes in the newspaper media, the regulations and discourses on policy under Emperor Gwangmu’s reign, and the discourses ~~which-that~~ appear in novels and bulletins. Indeed, new texts must be discovered for future research on the modern in Korea and the relationship between these texts must be clarified. The relationship between ~~the~~ pre- and post-~~the~~ 1910s must also be taken into consideration in the pursuit of a more concrete vision of the modern in Korea.

With these restrictions in mind, then, this paper will examine the characteristics of the concept of the “individual” as it appears in texts written by enlightenment intellectuals considered to be the most liberal~~ist~~ and show how the “individual” requires both the “state” and the order of “law.” The paper will then clarify that the notions of the individual and liberalism in the ~~concept of the~~ modern in Korea ~~was-were~~ not absent or scarce but rather that their substance was constantly forming.

The “Individual” in Yu Gil-jun: Individuals as People

While the concept of the modern state was introduced already in the 1880s,⁶ concepts such as “each person” (*gagin*), “singleness” (*dogilja*), and the “individual” (*gaein*) appeared in the *Seoyu gyeonmun* (Observations on a Journey to the West) written by Yu Gil-jun (1856-1914) in the 1890s.⁷ It was Yu Gil-jun who introduced and accepted the philosophy of Fukuzawa Yukichi and discussed people’s rights and freedom. He noted not only the natural rights that all human beings have, but also the rights of ~~the~~ “each person” or “one person” (*irin*) in his writing:

The state must first and foremost secure the rights of each person; only then ~~should~~ the state’s rights ~~should~~ be decided by what the people wish to protect (*Jeonseo* 1971, 1: 99).

Here, his mention of the rights of each person is merely declarative. This is because he translates human rights as “general justice” (*tongui*) and fails to make a clear distinction between “people’s rights” and “individual rights.” Furthermore, his concept of rights includes many limitations. For example, he says that the rights of those who rent land or fields must be limited not only by reasonable law (*Jeonseo* 1971, 1: 109) but also by

⁶ The Chinese translation of *Elements of International Law* was introduced already in the 1880s. Yi G. (1982).

⁷ Yu Gil-jun (1856-1914) came into contact with the *Haiguo tuzhi* (Illustrated Treatise of Nations across the Sea) for the first time in 1873. He went to Japan to study in 1881 when he was 26 years old and studied under Fukuzawa Yukichi. At 28 he studied under Edward S. Morse as the first Korean student in the United States. He completed the *Seoyu gyeonmun* in 1889, and it was published in 1895. He also published *Jeongchihak* (Political Science) in 1907. The quotations from Yu’s *Seoyu gyeonmun* come from *Yu Gil-jun jeonseo* (Complete Works of Yu Gil-jun) published in 1971 (hereafter referred to as *Jeonseo*).

morality.

Limitations are also expressed in his reference to human freedom. Yu Gil-jun divides the concept of freedom into well-freedom and ill-freedom [could you just say “good freedom” and “bad freedom”?] according to reasonable law. On one hand, by stating that humans are selfish beings who “attain their ~~reason~~-desires[goals] [the meaning is unclear] by following their likes or dislikes” (*Jeonseo* 1971, 1: 150), he considered that human selfishness is natural in a sense and competition arising from selfishness should be the driving force for the development of civilization. He argued that “freedom means to act on what one feels like doing” (*Jeonseo* 1971, 1: 111), but limited freedom by saying that the freedom to use one’s natural rights is only possible when it coincides with reasonable law. In other words, “freedom” and “general justice[universal justice]” are maintained and controlled by ~~the~~ divine law. In his early texts, an individual’s freedom and rights were partially accepted. But not all individual desires were accepted since only ~~the~~ “well-freedom in the pursuit of desires in accordance with divine law” (*Jeonseo* 1971, 1: 110) can be justified. In this respect, individual freedom and rights have only a general meaning, not a substantial one.

Since Korea was still under monarchical rule in 1907 when Emperor Gwangmu (King Gojong) was forced to abdicate and Emperor Yunghui (King Sunjong) was enthroned under the third Korea-Japan Agreement, it is clear that the term “individual” was not used to describe a person with ~~an~~-independent sovereignty, but used without distinction from the general people. The term did not imply an independent being unrestricted by monarchical authority but rather implied the term with which to refer to the people. Even though there was little choice but to accept monarchical authority until its collapse, Yu’s writings do not include any critical attitude toward or theoretical

explanation ~~on~~of the relationship between the monarch and the people or the monarch and individuals. It is therefore an exaggeration to extract natural rights, people's rights, and popular sovereignty from the few references in his works.

In the early texts on the enlightenment discourses the concept of the individual was not discussed within a framework of the sovereign individual or the political subject. Rather, the individual was defined as a holder of rights and was not clearly differentiated from the comprehensive and general subject of "people." Indeed, in Yu Gil-jun's texts the individual did not exist--only the "people" did. Furthermore, the term "people" was used, but this did not carry the meaning of "subject."

The "Individual" in *The Independent*: From the People's Rights to the Individual's Rights of Life and Property

In the *Dongnip sinmun* (The Independent), terms such as "people" (*inmin*) or "commoners" (*baekseong*) were mainly used in order to designate the modern subject, and the terms "nation" (*gungmin*), "subjects" (*sinmin*), or "compatriots" (*dongpo*) appeared at times and were used together without any great distinction in meaning. However, the rights of one's "self" (*jagi*) or the rights of one's property were referred to quite often. The following table shows the frequency of appearance of ~~the~~ terms such as "people," "nation," or "the self" as subjects in *The Independent*.

	1896	1897	1898	1899
<i>baekseong</i> (commoners)	447	453	762	814

<i>inmin</i> (people)	326	429	542	235
<i>gungmin</i> (nation)	24	23	39	12
<i>sinmin</i> (subjects)	29	49	50	34
<i>dongpo</i> (compatriots)	17	24	82	25
<i>hyeongje</i> (brothers)	33	39	54	19
<i>manmin</i> (all the people)	1	1	59	4
<i>injong</i> (races)	10	44	23	84
<i>jagi</i> (the self)	231	342	141	307
<i>jayu</i> (freedom)	8	12	24	34
<i>jayugwon</i> (right to freedom)	2	6	1	1
<i>jaju</i> (independence)	25	112	86	40
<i>gwoilli</i> (rights)	33	162	154	122
<i>jaesan</i> (property)	14	28	73	46

The terms designating the individual appear to be considerably more important in this newspaper, and are invested with substantial meaning. This is because individual rights are regarded as independent rights in which the state or government cannot interfere. For example, an editorial column in *The Independent* from 3 December 1896 stated the importance of civilization and enlightenment by noting that the reasons why “Japan has become the strongest and wealthiest country in Asia,” as opposed to its situation thirty years before, were because Japan followed three principles: “engaging in scientific studies, learning how to manufacture and produce goods, and authorizing the enforcement of rights that even the emperor cannot interfere with, as long as the individual--regardless of his or her property and opinions--does not violate the law”

(*The Independent*, December 3, 1896). The importance of education and the encouragement of industry were continually argued for in the process of civilization and enlightenment, but this statement in particular stressed that Japan's strength ~~is~~was based on the fact that even the emperor ~~cannot~~could not interfere with the rights of the individual's property and opinions.

~~The~~ individual rights usually refer to the rights of life and property. *The Independent* found the source of people's evil actions in the failure of the government to protect their life and property and stressed that the purpose of the law was to assure that people's rights ~~shall~~should not be taken away by others.⁸

The original purpose of the law is First, as all people have rights, their rights shall not be taken away by others. . . . Without this understanding, people will always try to add others' rights to their own rights, or will become unyielding and self-centered in the struggle to protect their rights from others, thus creating a situation of great dissatisfaction and confusion among the people. . . . ~~The reason that~~ Korea is inferior to other countries and its situation is insecure ~~is~~ because people are being deprived of their rights by others or are taking away others' rights . . . and thus people are divided (*The Independent*, March 18, 1897).

This quotation considers the protection of people's life and property as the

⁸ New views on human life and death, other than the traditional Confucian approach, appeared in this period. For example, ~~*The Independent*~~ from 26 September 1899, *The Independent* criticized the abuses of traditional punishment: "Among all punishments, capital penalty is the most severe; and damaging the body of the dead or tearing a dead body into pieces is meaningless to the dead." This negates the traditional idea that a man's death is related to honor. This realistic approach to humans and the notion of human rights centering on ~~the~~ property rights are closely connected.

government's most important role. ~~The expressions of~~ The government's role was ~~appeared~~ repeatedly mentioned and ~~were~~ greatly emphasized in *The Independent*: "The government must govern political affairs peacefully. . . . The government does not have the authority to decide people's livelihood, but has the duty to preserve it" (May 20, 1897); "Among its numerous duties for the people, the protection of life and property is the most important to the government" (October 31, 1896); and "The rights regarding people's property are crucial and must be protected from thieves" (August 12, 1897).⁹

The purpose of the establishment of the Hyeopseonghoe, the first modern students' organization, included the protection of individual rights, peaceful administration of the state, protection of family rights, and management of the self (*The Independent*, December 4, 1897). As the following ~~quotation~~ passage shows, the Dongnip Hyeophoe (Independence Club) considered the protection of people's life and property to be of utmost importance:

The responsibilities of the Club are as follows: First, to ensure that the government faithfully protects the life and property of the people; second, to ensure that no one is arrested or kept in custody for no reason; third, to ensure that an accused shall be considered innocent until his or her crime is proven after standing trial; fourth,

⁹ In addition, the emphasis on the revival of property and industry can be found in other articles as well. *The Independent* encourages the industry itself as follows: the necessity of manufacturing of goods (August 7, 1897); the importance of freedom (June 9, 1898); the rules regarding commercial trade with foreign countries (April 14, 1898); the new socioeconomic situation such as investment in stocks, the introduction of machinery, and industry (June 12, 1897); Korean trade (August 10, 1898); the rise in prices that stimulates competition (August 20, 1898); and credit on currency (July 11, 1898). These articles stress that one's own property, a result of wealth, should be protected from others, which indicates the substantial meaning of the rights of the "individual."

to ensure that an accused receives a due trial no longer than twenty-four hours after his or her arrest; and fifth, to ensure that if any one is arrested, his or her relatives or friends immediately appeal to the court for a trial.

Interestingly, while *The Independent* stresses that “individual rights” over property must be protected, it places restrictions on the “freedom and rights of the people.” The newspaper compares Korea with the French Revolution and calls people’s freedom or rights in Korea as undeserved:

There is a concern that a revolution similar to the French Revolution might take place in Korea . . . but it must be kept in mind that there are several differences between France and Korea. First, since the National Assembly existed in France, its people were aware of their rights even under conditions of oppressive tyranny, while in Korea the term “people’s rights” never existed, and has only recently been used. . . . Third, –for several years before the French Revolution, famous French intellectuals circulated information regarding rules and regulations and taught the people of their right to freedom and the duty of the government via public addresses and newspapers. Therefore, many people understood how to use their right to freedom. . . . In Korea, on the other hand, due to the lack of such instructions by intellectuals, newspapers or relevant regulations, people did not know what freedom was about, and even if they had been given the right to freedom, they would not have known how to use it--it would have been like handing a knife to a small child. . . . Fifth, while Koreans are brave when faced with a personal struggle, they lack the same valor when faced with issues on a

national level. Even if their country were to be destroyed, they would continue to engage in nothing other than factional strife with their private interests in mind. When comparing these few points, one concludes that Korea today is nothing like France one hundred years ago. . . . We should never dream of these ideas, and concentrate on educating and expanding the knowledge of the people. We must not expect to receive undeserved rights; rather, the government and the people should unite in order to enforce the laws and rules that his Majesty has allowed. If we do so, the levels of education and intelligence will naturally increase and people's rights will be increased, thus bringing about the eternal stability of the Royal Household and the wealth of the country (*The Independent*, July 9, 1898).

The Independent advises to “not expect to receive undeserved rights” in this situation. Undeserved rights here refer to the assurance of the right to freedom and people's rights. This argument contrasts with the notion that government laws and the Independence Club consider the protection of the individual's property rights to be a point of pivotal importance.

Newspapers published after the Gabo Reform mentioned that the people's rights or the right to freedom in Korea must not be assured until the people become more educated and enlightened. However, as shown in the arguments that ~~the~~ property rights of the individual must be protected, ~~the~~ individual rights ~~mainly~~-centered ~~mainly~~ on property and were stifled by political limitations.

While people's rights were continuously ignored from a political perspective, individual rights were accepted and developed from an economic perspective. This fact can be confirmed in ~~the~~ newspapers that criticized the egocentrism ~~mind~~-of ~~the~~ people

as the main cause of social ills.¹⁰ Many editorials argued that people must not think only of themselves. These texts were written to promote enlightenment and patriotism, but their advice and recommendations prove that the pursuit of self-interest was increasing significantly.

The Independent warned that the French Revolution based on the people's freedom and rights must not break out in Korea. This clearly shows that the people were not seen as substantial subjects that constitute a state or society: they were simply targets of education and enlightenment and were not referred to as subjects with the right to think about the direction and details of civilization and act together. Koreans at the time were not called the "people" with a substantial meaning, nor were they born into a "nation."

The concept of "rights" that was repeatedly mentioned in *The Independent* was not used in the context of people's rights or the right to freedom; rather, the concept was used in the context of the protection of one's independent property, as was clear from the frequency of this concept in the newspaper. The concept of "rights" appeared very often: 33 times in 1896, 162 in 1897, 154 in 1898, and 122 in 1899. But concepts such as "freedom" (8, 12, 24, 34) and; "the right to freedom" (2, 6, 1, 1) rarely appeared. On

¹⁰ For example, *The Independent* (September 4, 1897) notes that people lack patriotism and think of only of themselves: "Whenever this country faces a calamity, its people never think of ways to help their country; they think first of how to pass on their responsibilities to the next person. The people pass on their responsibilities to their village officials, and the village officials to their monarch. The future of the country, however, depends not just on the ruler of the country, but on the entire body of people. . . . The situation in Korea is serious: people are concerned only for their own safety rather than the safety of their monarch or their country. How can a monarch expect to rule and govern his people under such conditions?" In addition to this, the paper suggests that "the wise man should not think only of himself" (November 13, 1898).

the other hand, there was a significant increase in concepts such as the “self” (231, 342, 141, 307); and “property” (14, 28, 73, 46).

Notably, the terms “nation” and “subjects” were not of ultimate importance in *The Independent*, and of the widely used terms—people, commoners, and the self—, “the people” was a very general and abstract term, and was used only as an object of enlightenment. Only the “self” had a concrete meaning. In conclusion, even in texts from the enlightenment period, ~~the~~ “the people” had no substantial meaning. In addition, ~~the~~ “rights,” the central notion of the enlightenment, were not people’s rights, but the rights of the self, and more specifically, the rights by which the body and property of the self must be protected.

The Significance of the Discursive Vacuum ~~of Discourse~~ between 1899 and 1905: A Vacuum of Enlightenment? Or Struggles between Enlightenment Discourses?

Modern concepts appeared frequently in numerous publications from the *Hanseong sunbo* (Seoul Thrice Monthly) and the *Hanseong jubo* (Seoul Weekly) of the 1880s till *The Independent* of the late 1890s. However, the publications that played an important role in the diffusion of these concepts decreased considerably from the beginning of the dismantlement of the Independence Club and the Manmin Gongdonghoe (Rally of Ten Thousand People) as well as the discontinuance of *The Independent* in 1899 until the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. In particular, books and bulletins shrunk rapidly between 1899 and 1905, but increased again after 1905. ~~The d~~Discourses on modern civilization and enlightenment, ~~and~~ the political system, and cultural

development also changed with the historical transformations of these media. For example, from 1894 to 1899 events such as the Peasant War, the Sino-Japanese War, and the Gabo Reform took place, and many modern concepts entered the field of discourse ~~field~~ during this dynamic period. From 1899 to 1905 these discourses went into hibernation, and after 1905 they once again became a heated topic of conversation.¹¹

The fluctuations in discourse resulted from the historical background of the period between 1899 and 1905 during which the constitution of the Great Han Empire was established under the reign of Emperor Gwangmu. The Empire was proclaimed in 1897, the Independence Club that threatened the monarchy was disbanded in 1898, and the absolute monarchical authority proceeded with the promulgation of the Great Han Empire constitution in 1899.¹² Emperor Gwangmu attempted to strengthen his monarchy despite threats of a coup d'état and assassination by establishing the Wonsubu, an office to guard the Royal Households, and the Gyeongwiwon, a special police agency under the superintendence of the Royal Households.¹³ In this process, considerable political oppression was exercised against political movements from below, and any political expressions rejecting the monarchy were prohibited. The eControls

¹¹ For example two bulletins were published before 1899: *Chinmokhoe hoebo* (1896. 12–1898. 4) and *Daeseon dongnip hyeophoe hoebo* (1896. 11–1897. 8). It was not until 1906 that bulletins began to appear again. The bulletins published after 1906 are: *Daehan jagang wolbo* (1906. 7–1907. 7), *Seou* (1906. 12–1908. 1), *Taegeuk hakbo* (1906. 8–1908. 11), *Daehan yuhaksaeng hakbo* (1907. 3–1907. 5), *Daehan hakhoe wolbo* (1908.2–1908. 11), *Daehan hyeophoe hoebo* (1908. 4–1909. 3), *Honam hakbo* (1908. 6–1909. 3), *Daedong hakhoe wolbo* (1908. 2–1909. 9), and *Daehan heunghakbo* (1909. 3–1910. 5). As for newspapers, the *Dongnip sinmun* (1896. 4. 7–1899. 12. 4) and the *Hyeopseonghoe hoebo • Maeil sinmun* (1898. 1. 1–1899. 4. 4) were published until 1899 and the *Daehan maeil sinbo* was published from 1904 (1904. 7. 18–1910. 8. 30). Books decreased sharply after 1899 and increased rapidly from 1905.

¹² Kim D. (2000); and Seo J. (1996).

¹³ Cha (1996, 98); and Seo Y. (1997).

over the freedom of speech, such as the 1899 and 1906 regulations on newspapers as well as the press law forced by Japan in 1907, exacerbated this situation.¹⁴ Therefore, discourses regarding the reform of the political system or modern civilization were dramatically curtailed.

On the surface, the period between 1899 and the early 1900s was considered a period of vacuum of enlightenment discourses. However, it is difficult to tell whether this was a vacuum in enlightenment or a change in the qualitative aspects of discourse. When taking into account the historical background of the period, during which the Great Han Empire was strengthened and the Independence Club and the Rally of Ten Thousand People were dismantled, it seems that there was a change in the subject and the contents of enlightenment, not a vacuum of enlightenment per se. The enlightenment discourse in this period was a national strategy, and this can be found in the laws drafted, established, and enforced by Emperor Gwangmu. Considering the continuity of the enlightenment group discourse, the restriction on newspapers, the banishment of Seo Jae-pil, and the disbandment of the Independence Club in 1899 served as significant opportunities. However, the explosion of discourse after Emperor Gwangmu lost power can be explained by the fact that the discourses had not been cut off--they had rather lain dormant. Discourse probably continued in other forms as fiction or rumors. Different discourses might have competed with each other behind the enlightenment vacuum, which was quietly growing and developing. And these discourses burst to the

¹⁴ There were two attempts at regulating newspapers in 1899 and 1906 but neither was announced. The press law was then promulgated on 27 July 1907, the period around which King Gojong was abdicated the throne. The security law was promulgated on 27 July 1907 in anticipation of the disbandment of the army on 1 August, and thereafter discourses were restricted through the association ordinance in September 1908 and the publication law in February 1909. Choe (1981, 98).

surface with the lifting of the restrictions of newspapers that had been implemented by Emperor Gwangmu.

Textbooks between 1906 and 1910 and the Individual: From *Gungmin* to Individual, from *Gungmin* to *Minjok*

The above-mentioned conditions began to change after the Japanese empire gained power and the monarchy in Korea was weakened. The Protectorate Treaty concluded on 17 November 1905 deprived Korea of its diplomatic rights, and the monarchical system--the central ruling system in Korea--was significantly weakened. Emperor Gwangmu abdicated from his the throne under Japanese pressure following a dispatch of the secret mission to The Hague in July 1907, and the emperor's power and authority received an irreparable blow with the signing of the third Korea-Japan Agreement. The Residency-General was established with the conclusion of the Protectorate Treaty in November 1905. This began Japan's steady control of Korean affairs.

Paradoxically, an active discussion ofn the modern after 1905 began with the a sharp decline of in the attempts to establish Korea as a modern state centered on the emperor's authority. With the lifting of the controls over freedom of speech after 1906, bulletins, miscellaneous news, and textbooks on science of the state, the constitution, and political science began to appear in considerable quantity. Some of the main texts included Yu Gil-jun's *Jeongchihak* (Political Science),¹⁵ Na Jin and Kim Sang-yeon's

¹⁵ This book was translated by Yu Gil-jun during his 11-year exile to Japan. Yi Hong-gu assumes that the book was written around 1886, mostly during his exile. However, Yun Byeong-hui asserts that

Gukgahak (Science of the State), An Guk-seon's *Jeongchi wollon* (The Principles of Political Science), Jo Seong-gu's *Heonbeop* (The Constitution) and more.¹⁶ The great number of textbook publications after 1906 was directly related to the examination system of government officials.¹⁷ These texts were written and published as introductory and preparatory textbooks for the appointment of government officials. It still remains to be examined whether the increase in enlightenment discourses and discussions over a new political system after 1905 was a result of the expressions of social discourses which were latent because of the weakening of the monarchy, or whether the increase was motivated by patriotic intentions to safeguard national sovereignty following the third Korea-Japan Agreement.

In most of the textbooks, including Na Jin and Kim Sang-yeon's *Science of the State*, the individual is defined as the subject who constructs the state with the power of society. The independent and exclusive identity of the individual is emphasized:

A state, as an entity of a nation, is one great community that exists for the sake of the independence of individuals and ~~a~~-social unity, which are necessary for the development of the life of each individual belonging to the state (*Science of the State*, 4-5).¹⁸

considering the publication of the first part of this book in the *Mansebo* (Independence News) from 7 March 1907, the book was translated before that date. Yi H. (1986, 5-10); Yun (1987, 48-49); and Kim Hak-jun (2000, 61).

¹⁶ On publication dates and the contents of ~~the~~-textbooks related to ~~the~~-political science, cf. Kim Hak-jun (2000, 62-64) and Kim Hyo-jeon (1996, ch. 4 and 6); and Kim Hyo-jeon (2000).

¹⁷ These textbooks were publicly notified-publicized as ~~the~~-materials for the state examination in the *Daehan maeil sinbo* (Korea Daily News).

¹⁸ Quoted in Kim Hyo-jeon (2000).

In addition, the independent and distinct meaning of each individual appears more clearly in the sphere, rights, mediation, or property rights of the individual mentioned in the disputes of private law, which is differentiated from public law. The texts of this period show that discourses on the people or the *gungmin* did not disappear, but the concept of the individual solidified and arrived at a substantial meaning as the subject that constructs the state. If so, was it by means of the expansion of the substantial meaning of the individual rather than through the defense logic of the *minjok* that the dynamic force in Korean history after 1910 was formed? It is precisely the selfish individual that was the subject who experienced the shift of national sovereignty. The subject of the post-1910 era, in conclusion, was divided into the *minjok* instead of the unformed *gungmin* and the solid “individual.”

Conclusion: Korean Liberalism and the Pursuit for-of New Definitions

As examined above, even in the main texts that discussed the enlightenment of the people, the concept of “people” did not have any substantial meaning. However, after *The Independent*, the newspaper published from 1896 to 1899, the concepts of the “self” and the “individual” that were contained in the concept of “the people” were gradually accepted with their substantial meanings. In other words, the term “people” had a general and abstract meaning or existed only as an object of enlightenment. It was the “self” that contained the most substantial meaning. In addition, “rights,” the core concept of enlightenment, did not imply people’s rights but ~~the~~ individual rights, or the

rights to protect the body and the property of the self.

In the process of the formation of Korean modernity, the subject of the period was not the nation--a term that never came to fruition--nor was it the empty term “the people.” The “individual” was the subject who experienced the historical shift of national sovereignty. After 1910 the subject was divided into the strong *minjok* instead of the unformed *gungmin* and the solid “individual.” This paper shows that the “individual” in modern Korea was not a term that had not been formed because of restrictions by the *gungmin* or the *minjok*, but a powerful term that competed with them, constituted their contents, or separated their names from the modern space of Korea.

In this paper, the “individual” and modern “people” are not seen as points along a linear continuation but are rather mutually exclusive. The people’s freedom and rights were nothing but abstract terms and, were limited under the argument that it is premature to exercise them in face of the reality of the times. Individual rights over property were emphasized as rights that must be protected, and the popular uprisings or the people’s rights that infringed on the protection of the-individual life and property of the individual were criticized. Therefore, the people’s rights were opposed to and in conflicted with the individual rights in that the former must-had to be limited to protect the latter. The state, however, had an indispensable relationship with the individual rights, not an exclusive one. The individual both needed and formed the state in order to concretize and protect the individual rights in the law. Therefore, while the concepts of the individual and the people in the formation of Korean modernity did not always have an affinity for each another, the concepts of the individual and the state were not necessarily exclusive.

Each period defines the people in a certain way, and they either identify

themselves with that definition or oppose and try to change it. This goes for modern history as well, and in the modern West the people were referred to as *gungmin*, *minjok*, or “citizens.” The French nation, for example, was born out of the French Revolution. But as Rousseau notes that a human is separated into *homme* and *citoyen*, the people in the modern space were unsatisfied with a single definition, and it became divided. In Korea, the modern *gungmin* was unable to be born, and after 1905 the term *minjok* officially replaced this empty space. In the meantime, the birth of the concealed yet stable “individual” was behind these terms. In this manner, the controversy between the different terms in the various texts shows that a term cannot contain a single, unified definition. The term is likely a result of the competition between terms, and it can contain other terms within it. The different modern terms were closely connected and, indeed, created and formed each other.

People try to construct the present based on their memories of the past. This has been a trend in recent discourses on the modern in Korea. Many discourses that have tried to remember the sorrow over the loss of the Korean nation-state constructed the present along the logic of the *minjok* or the “developed state.” Today, discourses that attempt to find the “individual” and “freedom” in the modern in Korea argue that Koreans must construct themselves as liberal individuals, and that liberalism restricted by a strong state must be constructed. Reflected in the above-mentioned discourses are ~~The~~ the arguments that ~~claiming that~~ a strong state was created during the formation of Korean modernity but the individual was not, and thus the present task lays in completing the incomplete modern or the individual, ~~reflects the above-mentioned discourses~~. In this paper, I clarify that the notion of the individual already began to take form and that the concepts of the individual and the state were not opposed to one

another but developed with mutual relations and by necessity.

In conclusion, if in the process of the formation of Korean modernity the term “individual” was closer to the rights of one’s property than those of the “people,” and the concepts of the individual and the state were not exclusive but rather were closely related, then the way the “individual” is remembered must be reexamined cautiously and critically. Korean liberalism must be also reflected as such. The reason Koreans are remembering the “modern” is that it is perhaps time to find new definitions that do not include the *minjok*, *gungmin*, or the “individual.”

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Glossary

baekseong 百姓

Daehan maeil sinbo 大韓每日申報

dogilja 獨逸者

dongpo 同胞

Fukuzawa Yukichi 福澤諭吉

gaein 個人

gagin 各人

Gukgahak 國家學

gungmin 國民

Gwangmu 光武

gweolli 權利

Gyeongwiwon 警衛院

Hanseong jubo 漢城週報

Hanseong sunbo 漢城旬報

Heonbeop 憲法

Hwangseong sinmun 皇城新聞

hyeongje 兄弟

Hyeopseonghoe 協成會

Iljinhoe 一進會

injong 人種

inmin 人民

irin 一人

jaesan 財產

jagi 自己

jaju 自主

jayugwon 自由權

Jeongchi wollon 政治原論

Jeongchihak 政治學

manmin 萬民

Manmin Gongdonghoe 萬民共同會

Mansebo 萬歲報

Seoyu gyeonmun 西遊見聞

sinmin 臣民

tongui 通義

Wonsubu 元帥府

Yunghui 隆熙

K C