

# The Significance of the Concept of *Minjung* and Changes Thereto: *With a Focus on the 1920s\**

HUR Soo

## Abstract

*The term minjung (people) as it started to be used during the 1920s in Korea was defined as the “indefinite majority or all members of the nation” or the “subjugated class.” However, the emergence of the socialist movement resulted in the meaning of minjung becoming one rooted in two stages. Minjung came to include varied meanings such as the “majority of the nation,” “political actors,” and the “illiterates and proletarians” in 1920-1921, and started to contain socialist notions of class by 1922-1923. Accordingly, cultural movement activists, who had interpreted minjung on both idealist and realist levels, began to discuss the term based on the social development theory, focusing on how to actualize socialist idealism under a colonial reality. To this end, socialists started to prefer the vanguard-based notion of daejung (public) from 1925 onwards. The use of the term daejung was further expanded in the 1930s.*

**Keywords:** *minjung* (people), *daejung* (public), socialist movement, class, vanguard

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HUR Soo is Humanities Korea (HK) Professor at Hallym University. He received his Ph.D. in Korean History from Seoul National University in 2005. His publications include *Singminji joseon, oraedoen mirae* (Colonial Joseon, the Old Future) (2011) and *Yi Don-hwa yeongu: jonggyo-wa sahoe-ui gyeonggye* (Yi Don-hwa: The Border between Religion and Society) (2011).

## Introduction

This study analyzes the meaning of *minjung* during the Japanese colonial period, with a special focus on the 1920s, and prepares the foundation for a comparison with the notion of *minjung* in the 1980s. The notion of *minjung* in the 1920s and that in the 1980s have similarities in that the term was understood as referring to the main actors involved in political movements. As the widespread use of a certain notion involves the diffusion of the term and particular social conditions, a thorough analysis need to be conducted in order to truly comprehend these phenomena. However, even a quick glance is enough to realize that these two periods both share unprecedentedly active social movements. The March First Independence Movement of 1919 spawned several national movements during the 1920s such as the June 10 Independence Demonstration of 1926, the Singanhoe (New Trunk Society) movement, and the Wonsan General Strike of 1929. Thereafter, the 1980s saw Korea's democratization movement reach its zenith in June of 1987 and the Grand Labor Struggle in July and August of that same year. In this regard, the notion of *minjung* was closely related to the development of these social movements.

This author conducted a comprehensive analysis of the notion of *minjung* during the Japanese colonial period. In my publication *Singminji joseon, oraedoen mirae*, I reviewed the use of terms such as *gungmin* (nationals), *imin* (people), *minjung* (people), and *daejung* (public) in articles that appeared in the newspaper, *Dong-A Ilbo*, during the 1920-1940s. It is revealed that the two terms *minjung* and *daejung* were engaged in a competitive relationship as far as their meaning within social movements, and that while nation standards were embedded in *minjung*, class standards were entrenched in that of *daejung* (Hur 2011a, 274-355). I also analyzed the use of *daejung* in magazines published during the Japanese colonial period, such as *Gaebyeok* (Genesis), *Byeolgeongon* (Another World), and *Samcheolli* (Three Thousand Miles). Despite raising examples related to *daejung* culture (mass culture) in urban areas (Hur 2011a, 204-273), I emphasized that *daejung* was often used in reference to social movement elements.

This study analyzes the meaning of *minjung* during the Japanese colonial period in a structural manner based on a lexicostatistics approach. Then, it examines the manner in which the meaning of *minjung* was altered amid the transition of the national movement and the emergence of the socialist movement. The result of this study is expected to provide important materials with which to develop an overall portrait of the notion of Korean *minjung*.

### The Emergence of the Notion of *Minjung* and Its Scope

A look at the *Joseon wangjo sillok* (Annals of the Joseon Dynasty) and magazines published during the enlightenment period from the 1880s to the early 1920s makes it evident that the term *minjung* had already been in use during the early Joseon period. In early Joseon, however, *minjung* was mainly used in the structure of the subject-predicate relation as seen in the case of *jigwang minjung* 地廣民衆 (“The territory is vast and *min* [population] is *jung* [large]”), rather than as a noun. The use of *minjung* as a noun began to occur during the sixteenth century; in the majority of such cases, the term was used to refer to people who were mobilized to take part in national projects and events such as *gaksol minjung suun geoseok* 各率民衆 輸運巨石 (“mobilization of people to carry large rocks”).<sup>1</sup> The use of *minjung* as a noun further increased during the late Joseon period. In many cases, it was used in a context denouncing the abusive state of the taxation system, such as the *hwangok* (grain loan system) and *gyunyeok* (equalized taxation), as seen in the example of *wimu minjung* 慰撫民衆 (“to console and cheer the people”).<sup>2</sup> By the final period of the nineteenth century, the number of cases involving the use of this term to refer to those involved in collective actions was on the rise. Salient

1. *Seonjo sillok* (Annals of King Seonjo), 26th day of the 2nd lunar month, 37th year of King Seonjo's reign (1604).

2. *Jeongjo sillok* (Annals of King Jeongjo), 1st day of the 8th lunar month, 14th year of King Jeongjo's reign (1790).

examples include *hyeopje gwalli seondong minjung* 脅制官吏 煽動民衆 (“threatening government officials while instigating the people”),<sup>3</sup> *bungyeok-hadeon minjung* 憤激하던 民衆 (“outraged people”),<sup>4</sup> and *minjung seodong* 民衆胥動 (“agitating the people”).<sup>5</sup> References to all members of the nation, such as *icheonman minjung* 二千萬民衆 (“twenty million people”)<sup>6</sup> also began to appear. From 1905 onwards, however, a period marked by ever-increasing internal and external crises, *minjung* was less frequently used than the terms *gungmin* and *inmin*, and the meaning remained within the scope of the traditional meaning of “people” while *gungmin* and *inmin* expressed “political actors armed with a notion of modern sovereignty” (M. Park 2009, 149-160; Y. Kim 2009, 314).

This mode of perception greatly changed during the 1920s following the March First Independence Movement. Living under the conditions of colonialism, characterized by the loss of sovereignty, the majority of Koreans became less than fond of the terms *gungmin* and *inmin*, which required the state as their precondition. Thereafter, Koreans who participated in national movements were perceived as *minjung*. Figure 1 analyzes the usage of major terms found in the titles of articles that dealt with national incidents in the *Dong-A Ilbo* (Hur 2011a, 284). Thus, we can see that *minjung* was much more frequently used than *gungmin* and *inmin* during the early 1920s.<sup>7</sup>

What meanings did the term *minjung* have during the Japanese colonial period? Let us review the uses of *minjung* in the magazine *Gaebyeok* (Genesis) and analyze its meaning during the early and

3. *Gojong sillok* (Annals of King Gojong), 9th day of the 4th lunar month, 33rd year of King Gojong’s reign (1896).

4. *Gojong sillok*, 15th day of the 2nd lunar month, 33rd year of King Gojong’s reign (1896).

5. *Gojong sillok*, 13th day of the 4th lunar month, 44th year of King Gojong’s reign (1905).

6. *Sunjong sillok* (Annals of King Sunjong), 4th day of the 12th lunar month, 2nd year of King Sunjong’s reign (1909).

7. A more detailed meaning of *minjung* during the early 1920s will be introduced in the next section of this article.

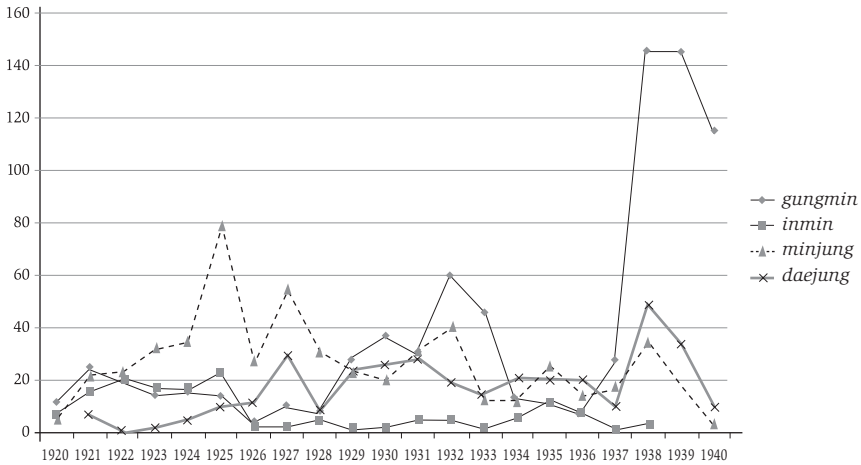


Figure 1. Changes in the Frequency of the Use of Major Terms as Viewed from the Article Titles in the *Dong-A Ilbo* during the Japanese Colonial Period

mid-1920s in a macroscopic manner.<sup>8</sup> Based on an approach rooted in lexicostatistics,<sup>9</sup> about 2,000 uses of *minjung* in *Gaebyeok* were separated into terms that could be replaced with *minjung* (which can be referred to as a paradigmatic relation), terms, phrases and sentences explaining the notion of *minjung* (which can be viewed as a syntagmatic relation), and terms with meanings opposite to that of *minjung* (which can be categorized as antonyms).<sup>10</sup> These are summarized as

8. The measurement of the use of the term *minjung* has now become possible since all issues of *Gaebyeok* have been computerized. The period spanning from 1920 to 1926, during which *Gaebyeok* was published, coincided with the rapid increase in the use of *minjung*. *Gaebyeok* was at the time the most influential monthly magazine. Because it also included essays from both nationalists and socialists, it can be regarded as an appropriate source from which to derive the general meaning of *minjung* during this period.

9. The methodology employed in the next chapter is based on the lexicostatistics approach developed by Rolf Reichhardt of Germany. For more on Reichhardt's methodology, please refer to H. Kim (2009, 93-138).

10. The computation data provided by the National Institute of Korean History was used to identify the frequency of the use of *minjung* in *Gaebyeok*. Such examples

the meaning of *minjung* as viewed in *Gaebyeok* in Table 1. Based on the contents of this table, the meaning of *minjung* can be analyzed more comprehensively.<sup>11</sup>

Table 1. Terms that Could be Replaced with *Minjung*  
(Paradigmatic Relations)

Example	Note
<i>saram</i> (person), <i>ingan</i> (human)	all members
<i>gungmin</i> , <i>inmin</i> , <i>simin</i> (citizen), <i>pyeongmin</i> (commoner)	<i>min</i> 民 (people) group
<i>nodong gyegeup</i> (labor class), <i>musan gyegeup</i> (proletarian class), <i>musan daejung</i> (proletarian public), <i>musanja</i> (proletarian), <i>nodongja</i> (laborer), <i>nongmin</i> (farmer)	working class
<i>dajung</i> 多衆 (multitude), <i>manjung</i> 萬衆 (numerous people), <i>manin</i> 萬人 (all people), <i>gunjung</i> (crowd), <i>daejung</i> (mass)	<i>jung</i> 衆 (mass) group
<i>ilban</i> (general), <i>ilban dongpo</i> (general compatriot), <i>dongpo</i> (compatriot), <i>joseonin</i> (Joseon people), <i>minjok</i> (nation)	<i>minjok</i> (nation) group

As one can see from Table 1, *minjung* was used in texts as having an identical meaning to *gungmin* 國民, *inmin* 人民, *simin* 市民, *pyeongmin* 平民, *dajung* 多衆, *manjung* 萬衆, *manin* 萬人, *gunjung* 群眾, and *daejung* 大衆. In addition, *minjung* 民衆 was also used to refer to all members of a community, *minjok*, or the working class.

The antonyms of *minjung* listed in Table 2 can be classified into

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extracted using *minjung* or 民衆 as the search terms stood at 1.949. Although a great degree of subjectivity is associated with the analysis of the correlation between the extracted results and the notion of *minjung*, general trends can nevertheless be derived.

11. The meaning of *minjung* is analyzed based on terms that were employed at least seven times.

Table 2. Terms with Meanings Opposite to *Minjung* (Antonyms)

Example	Note
<i>gwijok gyegeup</i> (aristocratic class), <i>yangban</i> , <i>teukgwon gyegeup</i> (privileged class), <i>teuksu gyegeup</i> (special class), etc.	privileged class
<i>rideo</i> (leader), <i>jido gyegeup</i> (leading class), <i>jibae gyegeup</i> (ruling class), <i>jeonjeja</i> (dictator), <i>jugwonja</i> (sovereign), <i>wijeongja</i> (politician), etc.	leader
<i>yusan gyegeup</i> (bourgeoisie), <i>jabonga</i> (capitalist), <i>bureujua</i> (bourgeoisie)	bourgeoisie
<i>yusikja</i> (intelligentsia), <i>jisik gyegeup</i> (intelligentsia), <i>cheolhakja</i> (philosopher), <i>hakja</i> (scholar), <i>daecheonje</i> (great genius), <i>daehakja</i> (great scholar), etc.	intelligentsia
<i>yeongung</i> (hero), <i>seongin</i> (saint), <i>hogeol</i> (heroic man), <i>seonghyeon</i> (sage), <i>wiin</i> (great man), etc.	heroes
<i>gaeche</i> (individual), <i>il gaein</i> (a private individual), <i>il danche</i> (an organization), <i>han saram</i> (one person), <i>pilbu</i> (commoner), <i>sosu gyegeup</i> (minority class), <i>sosuja</i> (minority), etc.	minority
<i>gwallyo</i> (government official), <i>gukga</i> (state), <i>gigwan</i> (organization), <i>gwollyeok</i> (power), <i>jeongbu</i> (government), <i>chongdokbu</i> (Government-General of Joseon), <i>gunju</i> (monarch)	government

four categories. The antonyms classified in the first category, such as the privileged class, leaders, heroes, and government, by and large refer to the ruling class. Viewed from this standpoint, *minjung* can be regarded as the ruled class. The antonyms classified in the second category refer to the bourgeoisie and, as such, *minjung* indicates the proletariat or those without property. The third refers to the intelligentsia and, given this, *minjung* denotes ignorants or those without knowledge. With regard to the fourth referring to a minority, *minjung* can be considered as containing the meaning of majority.

Table 3. Explanations of *Minjung* (Syntagmatic Relations)

Example	Note
<i>musik</i> (unintelligent), <i>muji</i> (ignorant), <i>mugyoyang</i> (uncultivated), <i>yuchi</i> (childish), <i>ammae</i> 暗昧 (unenlightened), <i>mi-e banghwang</i> 迷에 방황 (wandering in bewilderment), <i>cheol monnan</i> (immature), etc.	lack of knowledge
<i>musan</i> (proletarian), <i>bingon</i> (poor), <i>gia</i> (hungry), <i>seryeok-eopgo geumnyeok bagyak</i> 세력없고 金力 박약 (powerless and lack of financial power), <i>muljil-ui noye</i> (slave to materials), etc.	dearth of property

In Table 3, *minjung* is explained as people who are devoid of knowledge, wisdom, and property. These examples are closely related to the use of *yusikja* (intelligentsia) and *yusanja* (bourgeoisie) as shown by the antonyms in Table 2.

Thus, the notion of *minjung* during the early and mid-1920s was based on three aspects: (1) a general majority of the nation, (2) the ruled class, and (3) the working class consisting of laborers and farmers. In addition, there were many cases in which the lack of property and education was perceived as part of the very nature of *minjung*.

### Changes in the Meaning of *Minjung*

#### *Minjung in the Early 1920s: Tensions between the Ideal and Reality*

In the previous section, the meaning of *minjung* was analyzed from a static and structural standpoint. However, it is also necessary to analyze the dynamic changes in the meaning of *minjung* that took place amid the emergence of the socialist movement. This in turn can be achieved by reviewing the examples of the use of *minjung* found in articles and the contexts of individual editorials.

Both the left and right-wing factions exhibited a marked prefer-



ence in using the term *minjung* during the period that led up to the March First Independence Movement and throughout the early 1920s. For example, the expression *icheonman minjung* (twenty-million people) was included in the Korean Declaration of Independence (1919).

We hereby declare that our homeland Joseon be an independent state and that we, the Joseon people, be self-governing . . . based on the united loyalty of twenty-million people.

Seeking to become the “friend of the *minjung*,” the *Dong-A Ilbo* identified itself as the spokesperson for the Joseon *minjung* in its first issue.<sup>12</sup> The first issue of the left-leaning magazine *Sinsaenghwal* (New Life) emphasized the “construction of *pyeongmin* (commoner) culture”<sup>13</sup> and identified itself as “a vehicle for voicing the demands, desires, and yearnings of the *minjung*.”<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, the founders of *Gaebyeok* identified the *minjung* not as thoughtless followers, but rather as the main actors in bringing about independence (G. Kim 1921, 10-12).

What interpretation of *minjung* was preferred by the left and right during the early 1920s? The word *minjung* connoted the term *dasu* 多數 (majority), and involved three different implications. First, it indicated the “common people” or “majority of members” in the expression, “four thousand years of history and twenty million *minjung*” (Gangnam Maehwarang 1920, 121). The *minjung* in the above expression of “twenty million *minjung*” were broadly equated with the members of the Joseon nation. Second, under the concept of democracy that was gaining popularity at the time, there were cases when the *minjung* were perceived by intellectuals as main political actors.<sup>15</sup> This

12. *Dong-A Ilbo*, “Changgansa” (On the Occasion of the First Issue), April 1, 1920.

13. “Chwijiseo geup jojik” (Improvisation of a Prospectus), *Sinsaenghwal* (New Life) 1 (March 1922): 68.

14. “Pyeonjip-eul machigo” (After Completing the Editing Process), *Sinsaenghwal* (New Life) 1 (March 1922): 71.

15. The term *minjung* appears to have been conveyed from Japan. In Japan, it is said that the word *minshu* 民衆 was first used in the *Osaka Asahi Shinbun* in 1928. According to Noburo Haga, the term *minshu* competed with *minben* 民本, *pengmin*

is evidenced by the following examples, “The sovereignty of the state should be considered whole and sacred because it is owned by the entire *minjung*. As such, the *minjung* should participate in politics” (B. Jeong 1922, 52-53), and “The twentieth century is the era of *minjung*. Nothing, whether it be politics, law, economy, morals, or religion, has any significance without *minjung*” (Hyeon 1921, 107). Third, the *minjung* were compared with the elite or leaders that belonged to the bourgeoisie or intelligentsia, and defined as the proletariat and ignorant masses. In this regard, the *minjung* were compared to “those led by a young general with a dragon horse,” “those who rowed the ship led by Columbus” (D. Yi 1921, 2-3), and “those led by the elite class” while “suffering from chaos, illusions, and wandering” (D. Yi 1921, 3; G. Yi 1921, 31).

The second meaning of *minjung*, as the main actors in society and beings instilled with inherent rights and responsibilities, could be seen as contradicting the third meaning of *minjung* as an entity in need of leadership by the elite class because of their foolishness and poverty. However, the second perception of *minjung* can be regarded as approaching a theoretical definition. This definition was based on the democratic viewpoint under which *minjung* were perceived as actors endowed with equal rights that prevailed amid the global atmosphere of social reforms after World War I. Meanwhile, the third meaning contains a more realistic theory that reflected the perception that there was a need to enlighten young elites, which prevailed during the so-called cultural movement period<sup>16</sup> of Korea from 1920 to 1921. This was because the *minjung* still had not been awakened in colonial Joseon, which lagged behind in modern education and indus-

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平民, *shumin* 衆民, *minsei* 民政, *shumin* 主民, *kashu* 合衆, *minju* 民重, *minji* 民治, *jinpon* 人本, and *minsei* 民生. These words were narrowed down to *minshu* 民衆, *pengmin* 平民, and *shumin* 衆民. Among these, *minshu* 民衆 was finally selected. *Pengmin* 平民 was excluded because it directed attention to the conflicts between the aristocrats and commoners. Moreover, *minshu* 民衆 was deemed to have a more positive nuance than *shumin* 衆民 (Haga 1984, 351-352).

16. The cultural movement period refers to when youth organizations formed after the March First Movement were most active before their left-right separation in early 1922.

trial development. As such, ideal views of the *minjung* coexisted with more realistic ones. More to the point, these positions reflected a differing reality of colonial Joseon during the early 1920s.

### *The Reinterpretation of Minjung as a Class*

The emergence of the socialist camp as a new center of the nationalist movement, which was critical of the cultural movement during 1922-1923, had the effect of changing existing meanings of *minjung*.<sup>17</sup> The socialist notion of *minjung* that prevailed during the first half of the 1920s was one that strongly reflected the notion of class.

Asserting that the majority of the *minjung* belonged to the proletarian class, socialists Jeong Baek and Shin Baek-u redefined *minjung* (B. Jeong 1922, 32-33; Shin 1922, 19-20). This attempt can be regarded as a socialist differentiation from the first meaning of *minjung* found above. However, socialists at the time focused their attention on criticism of the third meaning of *minjung*. More to the point, they opposed the existing method of perceiving the *minjung* as “uneducated and proletarian.” Two main criticisms were levied by the socialists.

First, they criticized the system under which the *minjung* were perceived as uneducated. The root of this perception is evidenced in the following statement made by Kim Myeong-sik in 1921, “The opportunity of the *minjung* to gain knowledge and improve themselves cannot be compared with those enjoyed by the elite” (Kang 1921, 63). Ju Jong-geon (1925, 13) took a further step to assail the ideological character of the educational system, stating that the capitalistic education of society enforced the morals of obedience. Ju (1925, 16) asserted that the ultimate resolution of the education problem lay in the abolition of class discrimination and the fundamental reform of modern social organizations.

Thereafter, the socialists tried to remove the existing custom of

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17. For more on the emergence of the socialist movement and criticism of the cultural movement, refer to Hur (2011b, 151-158), Lim (2005, 211-240), and J. Park (2006, 42-56).

dividing the elite from the *minjung* based on the possession of education and property. Viewed from their materialist standpoint, education became a secondary standard with which to define people, compared to property or class. This perception was prevalent in the discourse on the intelligentsia. They redefined the intelligentsia as people who were both “intelligent and proletarian,” and asserted that the educated class did not have any fundamental relationship with production in society (Bujiam 1925, 8, 16). As such, the perception of the intelligentsia as proletariats endowed with knowledge effectively positioned *education* below *class* when defining human groups.

Let us now examine the relationship between the *minjung* theory advanced by socialists with that advocated by the leadership behind *Gaebyeok*, which was rooted in Cheondogyo (Religion of the Heavenly Way). Both groups were critical of the cultural movement during the early 1920s. They also boasted a *minjung*-friendly attitude, which blamed the elites for the problems of the cultural movement. *Gaebyeok* started to release articles written by socialists in mid-1923, a move that was in all likelihood based on these common denominators. The class theory advanced by the socialists at the time greatly influenced the *minjung* discourse in *Gaebyeok*.<sup>18</sup>

However, there were also differences between the two groups. An editorial in *Gaebyeok* warned that “the use of violence towards even the most minor of incidents by some socialist youths created a growing sense of antipathy amongst the regular *minjung*.”<sup>19</sup> In addition, behind *Gaebyeok*’s perceptions of *minjung* were the positions of the elite and the notion of enlightenment. This is evidenced by the following example: “the majority of *minjung* remain anchored in wandering and obstinacy” (D. Yi 1924, 6). Moreover, they regarded the elite as being more important than the *minjung*, even going as far as to compare leaders

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18. In his essay, Kim Gi-jeon (1923, 30-32) described the socialist movement in a positive light. Issue no. 32 of *Gaebyeok*, in which this essay was published, was advertised as the “liberation issue.”

19. “Jese anmin ji chaek-i chahoa pihoa” (Which Policies are for Saving the World and Relieving the People?), *Gaebyeok* 35 (May 1923): 12.

and *minjung* to clouds/rainbows and plants (D. Yi 1924, 6). Such contents are difficult to find in the essays written by socialists.

The tension between idealist and realist perceptions of *minjung* is not necessarily evident in the essays written by socialists. This tension was closely related to the concept of culturalism, under which mankind was perceived based on the notion of transcendental and experiential actors, as well as to neo-Kantism. The question then becomes: did the socialists not encounter the tension between the ideal and reality? These tensions were present within the discourse regarding the stages of social development rather than the definition of human subjectivity.

At that time, there was a sharp conflict between nationalists and socialists regarding the salvation of Joseon society and its developmental direction. Although the nationalists agreed with the idealism of the economic reforms advocated by the socialists, they felt an essential evolution of society had to occur before such idealism could be achieved. They insisted that class struggles only emerged when capitalism, which formed the basis of modern civilization, was sufficiently developed, but Joseon society had yet to reap the benefits of modern civilization.<sup>20</sup> As such, the nationalists asserted that because no shortcut could be taken in the process of social evolution, every developmental stage of capitalism had to be experienced in its due course. The socialists criticized the nationalists' logic on the grounds that it was impossible for Joseon, composed of a national proletarian class, to become a capitalist nation via competition with other nations. According to them, the proletarian class to which all the people of Joseon belonged should destroy the capitalist class by joining forces with all other proletarian classes.<sup>21</sup> This position was based on the logic that Joseon should move directly toward socialism without going through the consecutive developmental stages of capitalism.

While these differences of opinions between nationalists and

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20. "Jese anmin ji chaek-i chahoa pihoa" (Which Policies are for Saving the World and Relieving the People?), *Gaebyeok* 35 (May 1923): 8.

21. "Jese anmin ji chaek-i chahoa pihoa" (Which Policies are for Saving the World and Relieving the People?), *Gaebyeok* 35 (May 1923): 9-11.

socialists were aired as part of the conflicts and disputes between nationalism and socialism, these disputes were in fact caused by the development theory advanced by the socialists. The socialists criticized the social evolution-based thought of the nationalists, or the so-called unilinear developmental theory, and promoted class struggle. To this end, they introduced a multilinear development theory that was based on achieving socialism through a more “direct” route. The socialists agonized over the theories and practical measures that should be carried out to actualize socialism under the reality of colonial Joseon.

### *From Minjung to Daejung*

Socialists started to use the term *daejung* in their essays from the mid-1920 onwards. This term first appeared in *Gaebyeok* in 1921, when it was meant to denote the concept of *cheonji manmul* (“all things in the universe”) (G. Jeong 1921, 9). From 1922 onwards, *daejung* was meant to denote “those who appreciate the play” (Hyeon 1922, 65) or the “majority of the people” (Bak 1922, 101). Examples of such usage include: “1,500 *daejung*”<sup>22</sup> and “17 million *daejung*.”<sup>23</sup> These meanings were very similar to the first interpretation of *minjung* in 1920-1921. However, during this period, *daejung* was much less frequently used than *minjung*.

*Daejung* began to be used as frequently as *minjung* in the essay, “Mujonggyo-raya yujonggyo” (Being Religious Only after Being Non-Religious) that appeared in *Gaebyeok* in mid-1923 (C. Yi 1923, 30-35). Of special interest is the fact that the term *daejung* was used in this essay as part of the proletarian *daejung* rather than as a stand-alone word. The increased mention made to the proletarian *daejung* in the articles in *Gaebyeok* in 1925 was deeply linked to the rise of socialism (Hur 2011a, 229-236). *Minjung* was introduced as a neologism in *Gae-*

22. “Gu, simnyang woljung-ui segye-wa joseon” (The World of Twelve Months and Joseon), *Gaebyeok* 29 (November 1922): 97.

23. “Joseon-ui baljeon-gwa joseonin-ui baljeon” (The Development of Joseon and Joseon People), *Gaebyeok* 30 (December 1922): 2-3.

*byeok* in 1925 and explained as such; “*minjung* has become a popularly used term amongst the proletarians because it refers to the absolute majority of the proletarian *daejung*, with the exception being the petty aristocracy and the capitalist class.”<sup>24</sup>

The term *minjung* was also frequently used in socialists’ essays at the time. However, by 1925, there emerged a clear preference for the term *daejung* (Hur 2011a, 236). The following comments by Jo Bong-am in the interview with a *Gaebyeok* reporter can be regarded as a salient example of this transition.

If the vanguard unity constitutes the first step towards the establishment of a socialist front, then this united vanguard must be responsible for mobilizing the *minjung* from amongst the *daejung*. This means that the vanguard activists must learn how to mobilize the *minjung*. The mobilization of the *minjung* should be carried out based on precise observations of the current issues faced by the proletarian class. The advent of a realistic movement should be rooted in the mobilization of the *minjung* and the move beyond the existing activist-to-activist method.<sup>25</sup>

Jo Bong-am identified the survival of the *daejung* as being rooted in historical necessity. The reference, “for mobilizing the *minjung* amongst the *daejung*,” can be interpreted as the task of organizing the urban masses, which have sprung up as a result of capitalism, into the *minjung*, which would serve as the main actors in the movement. Here, it is necessary to pay attention to the fact that the *daejung* is identified as being engaged in a relationship with the vanguard. This is evident in the notion of “vanguard” in an essay written by a socialist that appeared in *Gaebyeok*, “The intelligentsia is composed of guerrillas and the vanguard of social reforms” (Bujiam 1925, 18). As such, the increase in the use of the term *daejung* in socialists’ essays, the emer-

24. “Choegeun joseon-e yuhaeng-haneun sinsureo” (Popular Neologisms in Joseon), *Gaebyeok* 57 (March 1925): 69.

25. “Chian yujibeop-ui silsi-wa geumhu-ui joseon sahoe undong (seolmun)” (The Implementation of the Maintenance of Public Order Act and the Future of the Social Movement in Joseon [survey]), *Gaebyeok* 60 (June 1925): 12.

gence of the discourse on the intelligentsia and the vanguard, and the debate over organizational matters from 1925 onwards can hardly be seen as an accidental phenomenon. In an essay that summarized social movements in Joseon, a socialist stated the following about the prevailing trends in 1925: “One cannot obtain any power without an organization and cannot gain any power without the *daejung*.” He then went on to add that “the efforts to establish *daejung*-based organizational power began in earnest in 1925” (Bae 1926, 33). Mentioning of *daejung* with regard to organizing in effect demarcated this term from *minjung*. The secret organization of the Korean Communist Party in April 1925, as well as the fact that it was led by the likes of Bak Heon-yeong and Jo Bong-am, only serves to strengthen the belief that a close relationship existed between the use of *daejung* and the emergence of this vanguard organization.

The use of *daejung* to connote the above meaning further increased. Expressions such as *daejung undong* (mass movement) and *daejung bonwi* (mass standard) frequently appeared in the principles of socialist organizations (TY 生 1926, 48, 51). In 1930, *daejung* was very frequently used in conjunction with the debate over the dissolution of the Singanhoe society, a united national independence front (Hur 2011a, 237-245). The term *daejung* began to be more prevalent than *minjung* in essays written by right-wing intelligentsia such as Yi Gwang-su (G. Yi 1931, 8-9). The emergence and diffusion of the term *daejung* during the mid- and late 1920s was also reflected in the neologism section that appeared in major magazines. Although only *minjung* was introduced as a neologism in *Gaebyeok* in 1925, *daejung* was introduced as follows in the neologism section of *Joseon jigwang* in 1930.

*Daejung* 大衆: This word has been widely used in recent days. (1) The vanguard is based on the *daejung*. (2) The members of a labor organization other than the executive members can be regarded as the *daejung*. (3) In addition, *daejung* refers to the majority of the masses.<sup>26</sup>

26. “Sineo jajeon” (Neologism Dictionary), *Joseon jigwang* (Light of Korea) 90 (1930): 71-72.



The pattern that saw the growing use of *daejung* amongst socialists during the mid- and late 1920s and its subsequent introduction as a neologism in magazines in the 1930s was replicated in Japan. In reviewing Japanese dictionaries used during the 1920s-1930s, I find that the term *minshu* 民衆 (*minjung* in Korean) first emerged during the 1910s and continued to be used up until the 1930s; meanwhile, the term *taishu* 大衆 (*daejung* in Korean) first emerged in the 1930s (Kyoseikaku 1930, 208). As seen in this section, socialists made an effort to move beyond the unilinear development theory and actualize socialist idealism right away despite the reality of colonial Joseon. The notion of *daejung*, which was used at the vanguard organizational level, strongly reflected the mindset of socialists.

## Conclusion

The term *minjung* started to be widely used within Korean society from the 1920s onwards. The meaning of *minjung* during the early and mid-1920s was based on three dimensions: a general majority of the nation, the ruled class, and the working class that included laborers and farmers. In addition, the lack of property and education was identified as the essential nature of the *minjung*.

However, the meaning of *minjung* proved to be fluid. The term underwent a dynamic change with the emergence of the socialist movement. *Minjung* came to include different layers such as the “majority of the members,” “political actors,” and the “uneducated and proletarian” during the early 1920s. While the meaning of “political actors” was embedded in a theoretical and ideal viewpoint that was influenced by the growing popularity of democracy, the notion of the people as “uneducated and proletarian” was one that reflected the modern view of colonial Joseon as a place where education and industry lagged behind.

The emergence of the socialist camp as the center of the nationalist movement during the early 1920s was accompanied by the notion of *minjung* as strongly reflecting class ideology. The socialists criti-

cized the education system that was set up to keep the *minjung* uneducated. On the other hand, they emphasized the materialist viewpoint while regarding the level of education, which was an important standard along with the “existence of a property (class),” as a secondary condition. Contrary to cultural activists who perceived the *minjung* based on two layers of idealism and realism, the socialists were more interested in skipping the capitalist stage in the various stages of social development and immediately achieving socialist idealism.

These concerns amongst socialists were closely related to the emergence of the term *daejung*. *Daejung* began to appear in socialists’ essays in 1925, and was widely used around 1930. As long as it was being used to indicate the majority or all members of the Joseon nation, *daejung* was not very different from *minjung*. However, it clearly exhibited differences from the existing examples of *minjung* when it started to refer to the level of intelligentsia, vanguard, and organization. The notion of a vanguard organization and purpose-driven movements emerged in the effort to actualize a socialist idealism that went beyond the unilinear development theory. Viewed from this standpoint, the term *daejung* strongly reflected the thoughts of socialists.

As summarized above, the emergence of *minjung* in the 1920s, its redefinition based on class, and the emergence of *daejung* were all closely related to the shift in momentum from the nationalist to the socialist camp. Here, it is important to point out that despite the differences between *minjung* and *daejung*, the two terms can hardly be regarded as having actually referred to two clearly defined and distinct groups. The colonial society and economy of Joseon did not change rapidly enough within this short period to warrant the emergence of new terms. Rather, the difference between these two terms reflected the changes in political thought and viewpoints amongst the colonial intelligentsia, and the reality of the disputes carried out as part of the effort to take control of the anticolonial movement. In this regard, the emergence of the socialist movement and their criticism proved to be particularly central. This study analyzed these points from the standpoint of intellectual history, with a focus on the notion of *minjung*.

As seen above, in the case of the cultural activists, the tension

between the ideal and the reality that existed for the Korean intelligentsia during the 1920s was given form in the debate over the idealist and realist interpretations of *minjung*. On the contrary, in the case of the socialists, such tension was subsequently expressed in the form of discourse over the establishment of the relationship between the stages of capitalism and socialism. While there emerged a clear demarcation between the positions of cultural activists and socialists, it also became difficult to regard *minjung* and *daejung* as having been stably positioned within socialist development theory. This would appear to mark a point of departure from the *minjung* theory that prevailed in Korea in the 1980s. The notion of the *minjung* as the “main actors in historical development” became widely accepted in the 1980s. In the future, the semantics of the term *minjung* after liberation in 1945 should be traced with these points in mind.

Appendix: The Meaning of Minjung as Viewed in Gaebyeok

Frequency	
<p><i>volk</i> audience worm public opinion</p>	<p>1 — 1</p> <p>the agitated plant aristocrat · commoner · citizen · farmer</p>
<p>the poor the needy</p>	<p>2 — 2</p> <p>the mistreated, oppressed under tyranny deserted (2) the pitiful, the loser of history</p>
<p>universal / popular / liberation society (3) world humanity, humanity, common in the world</p>	<p>3</p>
<p>heaven / god (3)</p>	<p>4</p>
<p>general (2) / general compatriot, compatriot / Joseon person / nation (2)</p>	<p>7 — 7</p> <p>proletarian, poverty / hunger, people in poverty / powerless and lack of financial power / slave to materials / wandering</p>
<p><i>dajung</i> (2) / <i>manjung</i>, <i>manin</i> (2) / <i>gunjung</i> / <i>daejung</i> (2)</p>	<p>8</p>
<p>labor class / proletarian class, proletarian <i>daejung</i>, proletarian (2) / laborer · lowborn · farmer, laborer · farmer<sup>a</sup> / farmer (3)</p>	<p>10</p>
<p><i>gungmin</i> (3) / <i>inmin</i> (4) / <i>simin</i> / <i>pyeongmin</i> (3)</p>	<p>11</p>
<p>person · human<sup>b</sup></p>	<p>∞ — 18</p> <p>ignorant (2), unintelligent (2), unintelligent · vulgar, no knowledge / uncultivated, low-cultured, boorish in terms of literacy and art appreciation, childish / foolish, stupid, silly (2), confused / fettered by tradition / immature / a person who did not learn about the will of god</p>
<p>(paradigmatic relations)</p>	<p><b>minjung</b></p>
<p>(causes)</p>	<p>(syntagmatic relations) (antonyms)</p>
	<p>— 21</p> <p>aristocrat · aristocrat class · aristocratic (8) / <i>yangban</i> (3) / privileged class (8), privileged / special class</p>
	<p><i>rideo</i>, leadership · leader · leading</p>

16	class (6) / ruling class (2), ruler, absolutist, sovereign, powerful person / political class, politician / patriotic politician
11	bourgeois, bourgeoisie, bourgeois class / capitalist (2), capitalist class, capital class (2), bourgeois (3)
10	intelligentsia (2), intelligent class (2) / philosopher / scholar / great genius, great scholar / self-awakened person / professional
8	hero (3), hero · saint, hero · heroic person, sage / excellent person, great person individual entity / individual person · individual group / a person (2) / commoner / minor class, minority, few minority
7	government official / state / agency / power / government / Government-General of Korea / king
5	well-to-do income class · the wealthy, money chaser, wealthy person / rich man (2), rich person
2	god / religion
1	warlord

Note: Given the difficulties associated with analyzing the context of and background to the use of the term *minjung* in conjunction with all the examples of *minjung*, the category of causes was omitted. Examples in which a new line was used for each term indicate unrelated cases whose frequency was individually calculated; for example, the terms *volk*, “audience,” “worm,” and “public opinion” that appeared in the paradigmatic relations section were only used once.

Examples which could be linked in terms of frequency are included in the same paragraph. The frequency was based on the sum of the examples. Furthermore, examples that involved similar meanings within the given frequency were divided by a “/.” When a specific term was used more than twice, “( )” was added after the term to indicate the frequency.

<sup>a</sup> “Laborer · farmer” were regarded as one term and treated as different from “farmers.”

<sup>b</sup> Such phrases as “twenty million *minjung*,” “fifty thousand *minjung*,” and “Joseon *minjung*” were used to refer to the whole society. These are marked with a “∞” because of the high frequency with which they were used.

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