

Special Feature

Historical Semantics of Confucianism during the Transitional Period of Modern Korea

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Civilizational Transition and Confucianism

Clash and exchange between the East and the West formed cracks in the knowledge system of East Asia, causing it to disintegrate and transform. Wei Yuan, a modern Chinese thinker of the enlightenment school, used the West in his book *Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms* (*Haiguo tuzhi*), which was published after the Opium Wars, as a means of “using barbarians to control barbarians” (*yiyi zhiyi* 以夷制夷). Paradoxically, however, the new concepts that were adopted during this period ended up rapidly incorporating China into the modern world. The changes in international politics of East Asia between the late 19th century and the early 20th century violently shook the traditional social order that had barely managed to survive and made the East Asian society question the *raison d'être* of Confucianism. Sino-centrism disintegrated, creating a vacuum in how to view the world. This empty space was soon occupied by the theory of civilization centered on the West. The universalization of Western modernity ranked the different cultures and histories of countries along the yardstick of civilization and barbarism. Even the differences in the natural environment and social mode of existence were lined up along a hierarchical order based on the standards of Western civilization. In the global expansion of the modern world system, the West, as the evangelist of civilization, justified the colonization of underdeveloped countries based on the theory of social evolution that touted the survival of the fittest. Behind their discourses on civilization was the narrative of historical progress. The progress of history, in which the West constituted what was universal, made it clear that the histories of non-Western areas were backward. This was during a period when the Sino-centrism revolving around China had passed through Joseon as the idea of Small China (*so-Junghwa* 小中華) and was just transitioning to Western-centrism. Joseon, the civilized legitimate heir of the Sino-centric civilization, was relegated to an uncivilized society. As enlightenment and progress became accepted as the axiom of nature, Confucianism increasingly became an object to criticize, reform, deny, and discard. The Confucian ideal, which pursued the self-realization of innate human nature and moral practice as represented by governing others after self-cultivation (*sugi chiin* 修己治人) and the awareness

of sagely qualities in one's inner self while practicing kingly virtues towards the outside world (*naeseong oewang* 內聖外王), was not only discussed merely as a limited tool in civilizational enlightenment and national construction but was no longer the key element of learning. The responses to such changes ranged from arguments to protect the orthodox and repel the heterodox (*wijeong cheoksa*), the stance to preserve Eastern ways and adopt Western means (*dongdo seogi*), and the promotion of civilization and enlightenment (*munmyeong gaeuwa*). The discursive field surrounding Confucianism was shaken.

The learning of the Way of Joseon, which had honored the Way of Emperor Yao and Emperor Shun, King Wen and King Wu of Zhou, and the Duke of Zhou, and the Cheng-Zhu School of the Song dynasty, was followed by the argument to protect the orthodox and repel the heterodox as Western powers advanced towards the East. The firm cultural dignity that the moral principle could not be abandoned even if this meant the collapse of the country was an expression of the spirit of the learning of the Way (*dohak*). Confucianism was an upright value that had to be protected, while the West was an entity to fight off. Some, meanwhile, argued to Westernize overall by accepting Western institutions and civilization. The stance to preserve the moral values of Confucianism while seeking convenience by absorbing the scientific accomplishments of Western technology emerged as well. The cause presented for the argument to protect the orthodox and repel the heterodox was based on the spirit of revering the king and expelling the barbarians (*jonwang yangi*) and the great righteousness of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*chunchu daeui*). The stance to preserve Eastern ways while adopting Western means was a kind of pragmatism to forcefully separate the Way from material force and maintain the moral principles of Confucianism while only absorbing the Western scientific technology. The argument of civilizational enlightenment, on the other hand, sought to Westernize in general by regarding the Western argument to civilize based on the theory of social evolution as the universal principle and to set civilizational enlightenment as the imperative task.

The development of modern media during this period rearranged asynchronous facts and heterogeneous values as synchronous and homogenous on the one-dimensional surface of paper. The influence of modern media in universalizing a particular Western civilization and teaching the task of the times, namely, to win in the competition and advance to the same civilizational stage as the West, was tremendous. Although the forms of responses differed, such

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as arguing for enlightenment by accepting Western learning and civilization while regarding tradition as an object to discard,¹ arguing for enlightenment of education, politics, machines, and material goods based on the traditional view of civilization,² or demanding the necessity of self-strengthening efforts in a cold-hearted reality in which public law and treaties were discarded depending on self-interests,³ they commonly aspired to become civilized.

In February 1895, Gojong proclaimed the “Edict on Education” (Gyoyuk joseo), which emphasized the need for a new education to preserve and restore the state. In August of the same year, the Ministry of Education (Hakbu) issued *An Elementary Reader for the People* (*Gungmin sohak dokbon*), the first Korean language introductory textbook on enlightenment. Education was the first measure adopted to become strong enough to overcome the crisis of the state and the nation. In the same year, Yu Giljun (1856–1914) published *Observations from My Travels in the West* (*Seoyu gyeonmun*), in which he divided the level of enlightenment into three stages and argued that Koreans must be the agents of enlightenment by autonomously and independently setting out to enlighten reality. The books and classics of the sages were no longer sufficient as educational contents aiming to self-strengthen. Western science, civilization, institutions, and scholarly trends had to be introduced.

The transition to modernity was a process of appropriating the symbolic forms and order of the West. Appropriation here does not refer to mere transplantation or imitation only in the form but the choice and exclusion of foreign civilization based on the spirit and culture represented by preexisting language and text. This article intends to explore the historicity of Confucianism during then by looking at the various movements and responses modern Korean Confucianism showed in face of the turning point of civilization. The methodology employed here is historical semantics. The study of historical semantics aims to reveal and define the social knowledge of a time when the historical epistemology, the history of knowledge and consciousness, the formation of concepts and the conditions of their constitution, and the routes and the deep currents of the epistemological transmission of cultural history was formed (Bak et al. 2016, 129). The discourse surrounding Confucianism and

the change in the Confucian knowledge system following the acceptance of new concepts serves as the basic material for this study. By looking at the pursuit of Confucianism as a universal learning as evident in the dispute over old and new learning, the argument to preserve Eastern ways while adopting Western means, the change in the traditional knowledge system following the adoption of the concept of philosophy, the controversy of the religiosity of Confucianism, and the movements to make Confucian into a religion following the acceptance of the concept of religion, this article will shed light on the historical semantics of modern Korean Confucianism.

The Dispute over Old and New Learning and the Appropriation of Practical Learning

Those seeking to protect the traditional intellectual system and the intellectuals of enlightenment, who took upon civilization and enlightenment as their mission of the times, both perceived the era they were living in as a crisis. An epistemological break occurred as the traditional knowledge system was imagined through scholarly concepts of the West. The mathematical approach and quantification of nature particularly made the traditional view of nature, which emphasized the network of connections between the cosmic world and human society, into an unscientific realm of study.

Confucianism, which had carried the status as Practical Learning in contrast to Buddhism, had to concede that position to the new learnings from the West and was relegated as the old learning. The place where the now dismantled traditional thought and knowledge system used to stand was filled by Western learning, which had newly been granted the status as a practical learning. The voices self-reflecting upon Confucianism grew louder, arguing that the learnings of the East before the three dynasties of Xia, Yin, and Zhou had also been practical but had fallen behind the West after doing nothing but speak empty words and focus only on literary composition. The response to the changes of the times by promoting the new learning of the West, building new schools, and ultimately enhancing the intellectual power of the people was possible because Western learning was perceived to be Practical Learning.⁴

1 “Editorial” (Nonseol), *Dongnip sinmun*, February 13, 1897.

2 “Editorial” (Nonseol), *Hwangseong sinmun*, September 23, 1898.

3 “Opinion” (Saei), *Hanseong jubo*, August 23, 1886.

4 “Heung sinhak seol” [Argument to Raise New Learning], *Dae Joseon dongnip hyeophoe hoebo* 14, June

In front of the powerful influence of the new learnings, the masters of Confucianism of the ancient times such as the Duke of Zhou and Confucius lost their authority, and the tradition of the learning of the Way naturally weakened. As the argument to accept the new learnings of the West to resolve the increasing domestic and international crisis gained leverage, the discussion to reform Confucianism also picked up steam. Bak Eunsik, who used to hang the portrait of Zhu Xi in his reading room and prostrate before it every morning, emphasized practical learning in his article about expanding the new learning to help the old learning. This article, which reinterpreted Confucianism by focusing on governing others (*chiin*) and economic prosperity (*iyong husaeng*), reilluminated the praxis of the Duke of Zhou and Confucius. The problem, according to the article, was how the tendency to investigate the principle from specific objects had declined, with Confucian scholars only seeking to find the principle from Confucian classics, which resulted in the loss of the driving force of practice.⁵ His sense of crisis that Confucianism will meet its downfall together with the state if they stood against the civilizations of the West by sitting around, wearing gentlemanly robes, and attempting to defend the state against the warships and cannons of the West by discussing nature and principle (*seongni* 性理) displays a desperate sense of urgency to reform Confucianism.⁶

Modern media founded around the 1900s functioned as a public discursive space where active discussions took place beyond simply introducing Western scholarship and culture. Opinions over new learnings and old learnings sharply clashed between scholars arguing to reform Confucianism and those arguing for civilization and enlightenment. For the advocates of civilization and enlightenment, the old learning was an obstacle to building a new civilization and had to be destroyed and eliminated. For those aiming to reform traditional Confucianism, however, the old learning was a culture that proved valuable when using the old as a guide to learn the new.

Those who argued to harmonize the new learning with the old learning accepted that it was a matter of fact for learning to change following the times. Since the fundamental objective of learnings of the East and the West were the

same, they said, disputes overly focusing on cause were unnecessary.⁷ The reason given was that the aim of learning, which was to preserve the world and govern the people, was the same regardless of the times.⁸ For instance, Sin Giseon argued that there was no such distinction between old and new in learning. All the various learnings of the West were no different from those of the East in that they were in essence a means to investigate the principles of nature, humans, and things and maintain everyday life as well as a method to sustain and develop the state and its people.⁹ All that needed to be done was to reach a compromise between the old and new learnings and utilize either depending on the purpose. The logic was to adopt the strengths of both sides: the merits of the principle, or moral ethics, from the learning of the East, and the material force, or scientific technology, from the learning of the West. From this perspective, it was by all means possible to harmonize the two learnings through ways such as having the principle oversee the material force and investigating the principle through material force.

Those advocating civilization and enlightenment, however, judged that the reason Western civilization had developed while the civilization of Joseon lagged behind was because of the learning based on investigating things and extending knowledge (*gyeokchi*) and practical learning. They thus introduced scientists (*gyeokchiga* 格致家) and science (*gyeokchihak* 格致學). By *gyeokchihak*, or the learnings of the investigation of things and extension of knowledge, they referred to science, which had led to the development of Western civilization. For them, the investigation of things and extension of knowledge (*gyeongmul chiji* 格物致知) was a fitting way to describe the methodology of science, which discovered the law of nature through observation and experiments. The new learnings of the West, represented by this learning of investigating things and extending knowledge, was practical learning, in which the utility of learning focused not on the moral practice of self-cultivation or the attainment of a fully developed character but the practical production of material goods. The most urgent task above all was to develop industries and enrich the country

7 Yi Jongha, "Sin gu hangmun i dongho a iho a sok" [Sequel to "Are Old and New Learnings the Same or Different?], *Daedong hakhoe wolbo* 2, March 25, 1908, pp. 16–18.

8 Yi Jongha, "Sin gu hangmun i dongho a iho a" [Are Old and New Learnings the Same or Different?], *Daedong hakhoe wolbo* 1, February 25, 1908, pp. 28–29.

9 Sin Giseon, "Hak mu singu" [There are No Old and New in Learnings], *Daedong hakhoe wolbo* 5, June 25, 1908, pp. 8–10.

15, 1897.

5 "Gwang sinhak i bo guhak seol" [Complement Old Learning by Expanding New Learning], *Seou* 3, February 1, 1907, p. 16.

6 "Yugyo e daehan uiron" [Discussion on Confucianism], February 28, 1909.

by educating people on the new learning. The realization of restoring national sovereignty and attaining autonomous independence while simultaneously teaching the old learning, still immersed in outdated customs, was hardly realistic. This was because the recovery of national sovereignty and independence was only possible when the work essential to operating a society could be handled without the help of others, which was not possible through the accomplishments of old learnings.¹⁰ In the comment that the present day was an era of practical learning and a world of practicality,¹¹ practical learning was not a search for the truth but a pragmatic study that would guarantee survival in the competition against other states.

There was no reason for the East to be deemed inferior to the West in terms of external elements such as the vast land, abundant resources, and its population. In reality, however, the East had reached the point where it was being humiliated by the West, which they had once regarded as barbarians. Discussion continued over why the West had become powerful while the East had deteriorated. By locating the reason behind the development of Western civilization in the investigation of things and extension of knowledge and practical learning, they could readily respond to the objections against the new learning. The logic went that the investigation of things and extension of knowledge was a long-standing method of study that already came out in *Greater Learning (Daxue)*, and hence, there was no reason to be reluctant to accept the new learnings of the West, which was merely a learning that excelled at the investigation of things and extension of knowledge.¹² In response to the concern that accepting Western Learning would harm the unique tradition of learning, they even resorted to the argument that Western Learning originated from the learning of China in the first place.¹³ However, as the learning of the West was defined as practical learning, Confucianism was gradually degraded to an empty study.

When *gyeokchihak* of the West was being emphasized as the practical learning representing the new learning, *gyeokchihak* here was used as translation

of the term science. *Gyeokchihak*, or the investigation of things and extension of knowledge, was useful for the economic strengthening of the state and was the reason why the West had become rich and powerful. The specific areas of study in this case included astronomy, geography, chemistry, geometry, climatology, optics, vocology, barology, electrology, and the discovery that all things of the world were a combination of 72 elements was also an accomplishment by the investigation of things and extension of knowledge.¹⁴ Mathematics was responsible to the development of the learning of investigating things and extending knowledge, which contributed to the welfare of the state. Mathematics was the tools of investigating things and extending knowledge and the basis of all such endeavors. The stage of the development of the investigation of things and extension of knowledge became the standard to judge the rise and fall of a country. The prosperity and decline of Greece and Rome had also been due to this learning to investigate things and extend knowledge, and while the eminent Confucian scholars and greatly learned people had both enhanced the study of principle in Korea, it had not been theorized or put into practice, and because they did not know how useful this learning of investigating things and extending knowledge was, the country was now facing an imminent crisis.¹⁵

This shows how the investigation of things and extension of knowledge, which was originally a method of self-cultivation and learning in the traditional study of nature and principle of Zhu Xi, had transformed into a means to bring about a rich country with a strong military. The investigation of things and extension of knowledge in this context had now changed from indicating the manifestation of the moral innate nature of humans to signify a practical learning that could realistically profit the people's lives and enrich the country. In other words, the object of study and the aim of learning had completely transformed. Now that the scientific investigation of an objective truth was at the center of learning, the discussion of value became limited to its usefulness in reality. The investigation of things (*gyeongmul*), extending knowledge (*chiji*), the exhaustive search for the principle (*gungni*), and the fulfillment of innate nature to reach the heavenly principle (*jineseong*), which used to be the key

10 Yeo Byeonghyeon, "Sin hangmun ui bulgabul su" [New Learning Should Be Accepted], *Daehan hyeophoe hoebo* 8, November 25, 1908, pp. 11–12.

11 Songnam, "Gu yeom o sok ham yeo yu sin" [Stained and Polluted Old Customs Should be Reformed], *Taegeuk hakbo* 24, September 24, 1908, pp. 3–12.

12 "Gakguk geunsa" [Recent Events in the World], *Hanseong sunbo*, March 27, 1884.

13 "Gwang hakgyo" [Expansion of Schools], *Hanseong jubo*, October 11, 1886.

14 Yeo Byeonghyeon, "Gyeokchihak ui gongyong" [Benefit of the Investigation of Things and Extension of Knowledge], *Daehan hyeophoe hoebo* 5, August 25, 1908, pp. 12–14.

15 Yeo Byeonghyeon, "Gyeokchihak ui gongyong (sok)" [Sequel to "Benefit of the Investigation of Things and Extension of Knowledge"], *Daehan hyeophoe hoebo* 7, October 25, 1908, pp. 10–13.

concepts of self-cultivation and study in traditional learning, were now used to translate the term science. For instance, the term science was translated as *gyeokchihak*, *gyeongmulhak*, and *gungnihak*. *Gyeokchihak* or *gyeongmulhak* was sometimes used to translate the terms philosophy, science, or physics. While the exhaustive search for the principle had been included in King Gojong's "Edict on Education," proclaimed on February 2, 1895, as one of the three doctrines, which were the conducts of the Five Relationships (*oryun haengsil*), diligent work and devoted efforts (*geullo yeokhaeng*), and the exhaustive search for the principle and the fulfillment of innate nature to reach the heavenly principle (*gungni jinseong*), its main use now was to define astronomy, kinetics and dynamics, geometry, and physics. The exhaustive search for the principle became limited to the investigation of natural phenomena and its laws, which were separate from human beings. The study of the investigation of things and the study of the exhaustive search for the principle were separated into the realm of physics and philosophy in tandem with the acceptance of Western learning. While the term *kexue* 科學 settled into place as the translation of the term science during the mid-1900s in China, *gyeokchi* was used to translate science or philosophy even up until the 1920s in Korea. As *kexue* (Ko. *gwahak*) emerged victorious as the translation for the term science, the significance of the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge as the symbolic point of departure for all learning and politics faded. This indicated the decline of the traditional knowledge system of Confucianism.

Confucianism as the old learning was declared to be an outdated learning that failed to keep up with the times, and the search for a new timely learning that kept up with the times continued. Learning should only seek to pursue the truth, the argument went, and neither Confucius, Jesus, nor Mohammad could be a teacher in the present times. In the statement that new theories, new thought, new conventions, and new institutions could not be built without the destruction of old theories, old thought, and old institutions, Confucianism was the old theory that needed to be destroyed for the construction of the new.¹⁶

Bak Eunsik, meanwhile, critically reviewed the problems of Confucianism of the past in "Essay on Confucian Reformation" (*Yugyo gusillon* 儒教求新論) and searched for a Confucianism that could satisfy the demands of the times.

Bak Eunsik judged that even devoting oneself to Zhu Xi's theory of the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge for one's entire life did not make it possible for one to catch up with the learnings of the present, which was the various sciences, that is, the study of investigating things and exhaustively searching for the principle. He went on to argue that people learning now must attain the innate ability to know the good (*yangji* 良知) through the Wang Yangming School and before setting out to do actual work.¹⁷ While presenting the Wang Yangming School as the alternative in reforming Confucianism, he emphasized practical learning and carried out the movement to define Confucianism as a religion by founding the Religion of Great Unity (Daedonggyo) on September 11, 1909. He exhorted people to revive the theory of Great Unity by Confucius and the ideology of centering the people by Mencius, correct the way Confucianism depended on the emperors and kings to be disseminated among the people, and actively raise future scholars. His expectation was that the Eastern civilization would greatly develop in the coming 21st century even if the Western civilization was advanced at the moment.¹⁸

The dispute over old and new learning represents the process of how the traditional knowledge system centered on Confucianism was deconstructed. All those involved in the dispute, including those arguing for tradition, those arguing to reform Confucianism, and those arguing for enlightenment completely, commonly aimed to move towards a practical learning. For those who argued to maintain tradition, however, practical learning meant the learning of the Way, which emphasized the praxis of Confucianism. For those arguing to reform Confucianism, practical learning meant to adopt only the strengths of both traditional Confucianism and the new learning of the West, considering the changes of the times. For those arguing for complete enlightenment, on the other hand, practical learning only referred to the new learning based on the scientific technology of the West. With the dispute over old and new learning, Confucianism gradually lost even its value as a past legacy from which something could be learned and was shunned as a historical relic that needed to be overcome. The learnings of the West, in contrast, was elevated

17 "Guhak gaeryang ui uigyeon" [Argument to Improve Old Learning], *Hwangseong sinmun*, January 30, 1909.

18 "Yugyo gusillon" [Essay on Confucian Reformation], *Seobuk hakhoe wolbo* 10, March 1909.

16 Geomsim, "Damchong" [Discourse], *Daehan mail sinbo*, January 6, 1910.

from being merely a technique or skill to a new learning that should be studied and even the principle of a new era that would lead civilization and historical progress. Terms such as the study of nature and principle, the School of Zhu Xi, the Wang Yangming School, the study of the mind, the study of the principle, and the study of the Way slowly vanished from the scholarly realm and everyday life following the change in the status of Confucianism.

The Adoption of the Concept of Philosophy and the Confucian Knowledge System

The Western scholarship and its concepts entered Korea via China and Japan around the beginning of the 20th century and served as the foundation for the formation of modern Korean scholarship. Initially, the concept of philosophy was defined based on traditional academic terminology, and the understanding of Western philosophy was grounded on the traditional philosophical way of thinking. This is evident in how various academic terms of Confucianism were used together with the early translations of the term philosophy. *Tetsugaku* (Ko. *cheolhak* 哲學), which became the general term used to translate the Western term *philosophia*, was a concept that had not previously existed in the intellectual tradition of East Asia and was a Sino-graphic neologism coined by the Japanese scholar Nishi Amane 西周 (1829–1897). In *Terminology of Philosophy (Tetsugaku jii)*, which was published in 1912, both *tetsuri* 哲理 and *tetsugaku* 哲學 were presented as translations of philosophy. A footnote was added to the terms, explaining that “This is the translation of Nishi Amane. According to academic theories, *tetsugaku* is the Confucianism (*jugaku* 儒學) of America and Europe. The reason it is being translated to *tetsugaku* now is to distinguish it from the Confucianism of the East” (Inoue, Motora, and Nakajima 1912, 114–15).

The concept of philosophy entered East Asia much longer ago. When the Jesuit missionaries brought the concept of philosophy into China during the 16th century, it was initially transliterated as *pirusupiya* (Ch. *fei lu su fei ya* 費祿蘇非亞) (Liu 2005, 536). Because it was hard to convey the meaning of the word only by transliterating it into Chinese characters, which was an ideographic language, it was explained to be a study of investigating things and exhaustively searching for the principle (*gyeongmul gungni* 格物窮理). This term

came from the terms, the investigation of things and extension of knowledge (*gyeongmul chiji* 格物致知) and the exhaustive search for the principle and fulfillment of innate nature to reach the heavenly principle (*gungni jinseong* 窮理盡性) in Confucianism, and originally referred to the method of learning that investigated the principle of things, attained proper knowledge, and led a holistic life. Philosophy for the Jesuit missionaries during then, however, was to elucidate the problem of God in relation to the human soul. The problem was that the God was of no concern in the investigation of things and the exhaustive search for the principle of Confucianism. Confucianism originally did not delve into the issue of God or death beyond life.

Gyeongmul gungni continued to be used until the early 20th century. In *Observations from My Travels in the West*, Yu Giljun understood philosophy as *gyeongmul gungnihak* and defined it as a learning that loved knowledge and sought to master the principle. It is particularly noteworthy how he categorized Western philosophers by using terms such as the study of morality (*dodeokhak* 道德學), the study of the exhaustive search for the principle (*gungnihak* 窮理學), and the study of nature and principle (*seongnihak* 性理學) (Yu 1969, 329–32). Jang Jiyeon (1864–1921) also wrote in “The Insight of Philosophers” (*Cheolhakga ui allyeok*) that philosophy, as a study to exhaustively search for the principle, was an advanced field of study that clarified the principle of the cosmic universe and pacified the mind and hearts of human beings by researching problems even science could not solve.¹⁹ *Youth (Cheongchun* 青春), the magazine aiming to enlighten published by Choe Namseon in 1914, featured a series titled “Introduction of a Hundred Studies” (*Baekhak myeonghae* 百學名解), in which the first items chosen to be covered were learning (*hak* 學), science (*gwahak* 科學), and the study of the exhaustive search for the principle (*gungnihak* 窮理學). A note added to *gungnihak* stated that it was philosophy (*cheolhak*) and listed both the English and German terms for philosophy. *Gungnihak* here was defined as a learning to investigate the fundamental principles of the universe, life, and knowledge and included the study of the principle of knowledge (*jisik rihak* 知識理學), the study of the principle of nature (*jayeon rihak* 自然理學), and the study of the principle of human life (*insaeng rihak* 人生理學) as its subdivisions. In this way, before the

19 *Hwangseong sinmun*, November 24, 1909.

term *cheollhak* became generalized as an academic concept, it was used together with other words corresponding to philosophy such as *gyeokchi* 格致, *gungni* 窮理, *dodeok* 道德, *seongni* 性理, and *rihak* 理學.

The reason the term *cheollhak*, which had been in a competition with *gyeokchi* and *gyeongmul* as the translation for the term philosophy, gained the upper hand was also due to the way *gyeokchi* and *gyeongmul* were also used to translate the term science. Up until the Meiji era, *kagaku* (Ko. *gwahak* 科學) was used together with learning (J. *gaku*; Ko. *hak* 學 or J. *gakubun*; Ko. *hangmun* 學問) or academic division (J. *gakka*; Ko. *hak kwa* 學科), to translate the term science. In fact, it was Confucian tradition, which comprehensively thought through knowledge and morality, that let *gyeokchi* be used both as translations for the terms philosophy and science. This resembled the etymology of the term science in the West to some extent as well. Science and philosophy were separated as two different areas of study only after the revolution of scientific technology.

Philosophy was mentioned before the 1900s of Korea as well but only as a particular study among many other Western studies. It was in 1910 when Korea began to think about Confucianism as philosophy, that is, one of the modern academic disciplines and part of the modern knowledge system. Namgung Eok argued that while Greek philosophy, which had revealed the principle of the creation of all things, had been helpful to do investigate things and extend knowledge (*gyeokchi*) for thousands of years until now, a society that pursued only practical affairs without concerning itself with religion and philosophy could not be called a society in a genuine sense, since it was not just things but all human affairs that contained the principle.²⁰ Bak Eunsik also stated that although the present times demanded the practicality of science from humankind, which meant youth in general should devote their efforts to its pursuit, philosophy could not be discarded if one sought to cultivate the key elements of human character (Bak 2002a, 572–73). Both statements show how Namgung Eok and Bak Eunsik attempted to connect humanistic values and scientific practicality. If Jang Jiyeon did not go further then defining and introducing philosophy, Choe Duseon provided a multifaceted analysis of the properties of philosophy that distinguished it from other various fields of study.

In the early stages, Western philosophy was accepted and understood mostly based on the intellectual horizon of Confucianism, such as in the cases of Yi Jeongjik or Yi Injae, but this gradually changed into a reinterpretation of Confucianism and traditional philosophy using the concepts and formulas of Western philosophy. A newspaper article in 1908 introduced the words of a Japanese philosopher saying that the brilliant splendor of Korea would shine further if Master Toegye was arranged in the system of Eastern philosophy and Westerners learned about the philosophy of Toegye.²¹ Although it quoted the words spoken by a Japanese person, the article is significant in that it provided a motive to consider traditional Eastern thought, which used to be a particular field of learning among many others, as philosophy by using concepts such as Eastern philosophy and Toegye philosophy. Terms such as Buddhist philosophy and Confucian philosophy emerged after that, and in the 1920s, An Hwak (1886–1946) published “A Survey of the Philosophical Thought of Korea” (Joseon cheollhak sasang gaegwan) in 1922.

Yi Jeongjik (1841–1910), who interpreted Kant’s concept of freedom as the original human nature (*bonyeon ji seong*) of the School of Zhu Xi, translated the concept of deity (*sin* 神) of Socrates as the heavenly principle (*cheolli* 天理), the miraculous nature of material force, and profound mystery of the principle of the heavens and nature in “The Theory of Bacon” (Baegon hakseol 培根學說) and “A General Survey of the Philosophical Theory of Kant” (Gang ssi cheollhak seol daeryak 康氏哲學說大略), thereby reinterpreting Western philosophical thought based on the intellectual horizon of Korean thought. Yi Injae (1870–1929) criticized the theory of Ideas of Plato from the perspective of the study of nature and principle in *A Critique of Ancient Greek Philosophy* (*Godae huirap cheollhak gobyeon* 古代希臘哲學攷辨), pointing out that it was an error to create two principles (*ri* 理) by separating the principle forming individual things and the principle that gave rise to the thing. Yang Geonsik introduced Liang Qichao’s “The Theory of Kant, the Greatest Philosopher of the Modern Era” (Jinshi di-yi da zhe Kangde zhi xueshuo 近世第一大哲康德之學說), where Liang Qichao had tried to prove how Kant’s philosophy corresponded to the meaning of consciousness-only (*yusik* 唯識) in Buddhism by translating Bacon’s empiricism into scientific method (*kexue fa*), Descartes’ deductive reasoning

20 Namgung Eok, “Sahoe johwa” [Social Harmony], *Daehan hyeophoe hoebo* 3, June 25, 1908, pp. 1–2.

21 “Toegye seonsaeng ui hak i haeng u llbon ja gu ui” [Master Toegye Has Long Been Mentioned by the Japanese], *Seobuk hakhoe wolbo* 12, May 1, 1909.

into deduction (*tuili*), and Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason" and "Critique of Practical Reason" into "Inspection of Pure Wisdom" (Chun xing zhihui zhi jianjian 純性智慧之檢點) and "Inspection of Practical Wisdom" (Shixing zhihui zhi jianjian 實行智慧之檢點), respectively, which was introduced into Korea by Yang Gyeonsik's "Theory of the Investigation of Things and the Extension of Knowledge by the Western Philosopher Kant" (Seo cheol Kangdeok gyeokchi hakseol 西哲康德格致學說). Unlike Liang Qichao, Yang Geonsik still used *gyeokchi* as the translation of the term philosophy in his writing, judging that the term corresponded to the ethics and moral philosophy of Kant in many ways.

Many discussions such as the discussion to classify the field of philosophy as metaphysical and intangible thought and psychology and the field of science as a physical study of physics and chemistry,²² the discussion that defined science as a learning with a systematic learning principle while reducing philosophy to the realm of pure theory that was not included in psychological science, physical science, or formal science,²³ and the discussion that consciously separated science and philosophy by explaining the development of human knowledge as starting from religion, which was followed by philosophy, and finally science,²⁴ allowed more people to understand the academic characteristics of philosophy.

The differentiation of the academic discipline of science triggered the transformation of knowledge from being an object of fear and reverence, as it had been in the Confucian society, into an object to be conquered by human beings. Ultimately, the influx of the Western concepts of philosophy and science brought a change in the worldview that used to perceive human being and the cosmic nature to be in an organic relationship and provided an impetus to dismantle the traditional knowledge system, which had drawn out the moral obligations of humans from the law of nature and replace it with a new ethics. Jang Eungjin completely set aside the learning of the Way, learning of the mind, and learning of principle of Confucianism and analyzed the morality and human behavior by using only modern Western philosophy. His "Theory of the Mind that Knows the Good" (*yangsimnon*) accepted Western empiricism,

denied the innate properties of the mind that knows the good, arguing instead that it was developed through experience by encountering the external world, since only humans carried the sprouts of the mind that knows the good. He relied on the theory of social evolution and empiricism of Spencer, which he had accepted while studying abroad in Japan and took the view that the action of the mind that knows the good manifested differently depending on the times, the environment, education, and developmental level of the mind. He criticized scholars of the Way who did not know this and only lamented the decline of morality.²⁵ The rearrangement of the traditional knowledge system was inevitable as more people began to perceive philosophy and science, which had been chosen as the driving force of the development of Western civilization, as a universal learning instead of simply a particular field of study of the West.

The Acceptance of the Concept of Religion and the Religious Direction of Confucianism

The change in the status of traditional religion during the transitional period to modernity was accelerated by the spread of the theory of civilization, which regarded the West as the center of civilization and Christianity as the religion of civilized countries. The traditional religious landscape, which had been constituted by Confucianism as well as Buddhism, Daoism, and Shamanism, which had all influenced faith and everyday life, could not but change with the acceptance of the modern Western concept of religion. It has not been that long since Confucianism, Buddhism, or Daoism were regarded as religion. Before the concept of religion entered from the West, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism were not considered to be religion. In fact, there was no problem in using any term for the schools of thought, be it Way (*do*), school (*gyo*), or learning (*hak*). In this sense, the framework that understands Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism as a religion is a product of modernity. While the acceptance of the Western concept of religion as distinct from the traditional term *jong* (Ch. *zong* 宗) or *gyo* (Ch. *jiao* 教) was first introduced by the Jesuit missionaries of the 16th century, it was only in the 19th century that the term

22 Yi Changhwan, "Cheolhak gwa gwahak ui beomwi" [The Boundaries of Philosophy and Science], *Daehan hakhoe wolbo*, 1908.

23 "Jehak yeongmyeong jeolyo" [Essentials of the Translated Names of Various Learnings], *Seobuk hakhoe wolbo*, 1909.

24 Im Ju, "Illyu ui sasang byeoncheon gwa jaerae jonggyo ui gachi" [The Changes in the Thought of Humankind and the Value of Traditional Religion], *Gaebyeok*, 1923.

25 Baegak Jang Eungjin, "Yangsimnon" [Theory of the Mind that Knows the Good], *Taeguk hakbo* 12, July 27, 1907, pp. 3–8.

jonggyo (Ch. *zongjiao* 宗教) became settled as the translation of the term religion.²⁶ The concept of religion took root in Korea by reinforcing the notion of a universal religion while Christianity was nativized around the start of the 20th century and including or excluding the traditional knowledge system of *do*, *jong*, or *gyo* from the meanings of religion. As the Western concept of religion flowed in, the religiosity of traditional beliefs became an issue, since they were seen as somewhat lacking compared to the universal religion of the civilized, i.e., Christianity. As the doctrines of monotheism, the doctrine of salvation, the doctrine of religious faith, and churches were now understood as the essential elements of a religion of civilization, the imperfections of traditional religion were brought into sharp relief. The theory of civilization which saw Western modernity as universal contributed to the perception that this notion of religion was natural and reasonable.

In 1899, Gojong proclaimed that he would serve as the head of Confucianism of his country and lead the efforts to revive the Way of Confucius. While religions worldwide seek to cultivate morality in the people and present the principles of politics, he said, the religion of Korea did not do so, which was why he would revive Confucianism once more.²⁷ This statement, while similar to the logic of changing bad customs into good (*ipung yeoksok* 移風易俗) proclaimed by former kings of Joseon, also reflects a large change: if Confucianism had competed with Buddhism, Daoism, magic skills, and superstition, now it was to be compared to and compete with other various religions around the world. It is particularly worth noting how Western religion, which had been rejected for misguiding the public sentiment by its nonsensical arguments such as the doctrine of creation and the doctrine of the afterlife, was now assessed to be of practical use for the state in both boosting public sentiment as well as in politics. Be that as it may, the larger the demands grew for the revival of Confucianism, the further the religious status of Confucianism continued down the path of decline.

The freedom of proselytization of Christian missionary work was

guaranteed with the signing of the Korea-France Treaty in 1886, although this did not mean that freedom of religion was completely guaranteed. Nonetheless, the influence of Christianity, led by its efforts in modern education and medicine, continued to expand by the day. Discussions about the social role of religion were invigorated as the Protestant Reformation and the Renaissance was introduced as being progress in the history of Western civilization. The editorial of the newspaper *Korean Daily News* (*Daehan maeil sinbo* 大韓每日申報) in 1910 lamented that Confucianism in Korea was going against the current trend, which was to separate religion and politics following the establishment of social organizations due to the development of civilization, and that the union of the church and the state, in which the ruler of the state was also the religions leader and the subjects of the state were followers of the religion, was a remnant of the past.²⁸ Kim Yunsik's understanding of religion was an extension of the stance to preserve Eastern ways while adopting Western means. He viewed that humans were innately good and that all religions, despite their different doctrines, were alike in their practice of good. In particular, he argued that the freedom of religion (*singyo jayu* 信教自由), which frequently appeared in diplomatic documents with Western states during the opening of the ports as the international law system spread, could be found in the Way of the former kings instead of originating from the West, as many had thought.²⁹ Yu Giljun defined religion as a "a school of thought worshiped as the supreme" in an "Account of the Western Religions" (Taeseo *jonggyo ui naeryeok*) of his text *Observations from My Travels in the West* and said the Korea's reverence and worship of the Way of Confucius and Mencius was no different from how all countries have a religion they believe in. At the same time, he expressed concern over the future of the religion of Korea as he compared Confucianism with Western religions (Yu 1969, 338).

Some were wary, arguing that the West was rich and powerful because there were many other learnings besides religion and that even the most outstanding religions cannot achieve civilization by citing the example of colonial India. There were also cases in which religion was used as a measurement of the level of civilization. According to this ranking system, the

26 The English to Korean dictionary by Underwood in 1890 translated the term religion to the terms *do*, *gyo*, and *seonggyo*; Scott translated the term religion to *gyo*, *jonggyo*, *gyopa*, and *jongpa* in 1891; and Gale translated *jonggyo* as "the national religion" in 1911. See Hwang and Yi, 2013, 378–82.

27 See entry in *Daily Record of the Royal Secretariat* (*Seungjeongwon ilgi* 承政院日記) for the 18th day of the 3rd month of the 36th year of the reign of Gojong.

28 "Damchong" [Opinion], *Daehan maeil sinbo*, February 1, 1910.

29 "Donhwaron" [On Transformation through Great Virtue], Vol. 15 of *Unyang jip* [Collected Writings of Unyang Kim Yunsik].

worship of nature in Africa was barbaric, Islam, Buddhism, and Confucianism were half-barbaric or half-enlightened, and Christianity was the civilized religion.³⁰ While there were optimistic views that focused on the role of modern Western civilization and religion and argued that choosing between the religions of either Christianity or Confucianism depending on the circumstances would bring a golden age in the state,³¹ an increasing number of articles discussing the role of religion in the state during the late 1900s expressed concern and criticism of Confucianism. Bak Heonyong criticized how Korea had lost its independent spirit as a result of being preoccupied with Confucianism and serving China as the Great when it should be striving to increase the power of the state and edify the people's minds with religion. His declaration that there is not yet an established religion in Korea reflects his suspicion of the religiosity of Confucianism and the indigenization of Confucianism in Korea. Although he pointed to the morals of human imperatives in relationships as the strengths of Confucianism and saw them as comparable to Western philosophy, his plea that the state and society must be encouraged by consulting both the Confucian books and classics of the sages and the religions precepts of the New and Old Testaments³² reflects the coexistence of a lingering nostalgia and concern for Confucianism. The skepticism of whether Confucianism was the adequate religion for the present times steadily increased.

The argument that Confucianism was not a religion was also raised. Although the Way of Confucius and Mencius was the religion of Korea, the argument went, it had characteristics resembling politics rather than religion.³³ This was followed by the criticism that Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao were to blame for the spread of the discussion that the Way of Confucius was philosophy and not a religion.³⁴ The voices demanding the reformation of Confucianism in a time where all countries around the world were competing against one another in each aspect, whether it was politics or religion, grew

louder. The editorial of *Imperial Capital News (Hwangseong sinmun)*, which sought the crisis of Confucianism from within based on the theory of civilization, presented the five evils causing the decline of Confucianism as the monopolization and control of the press, the lack of pursuit of real principle, factional strife between schools of thought, inability to communicate from being tied down by the past, and adhering to the old laws while only caring about personal principles.³⁵ The representative attempt to self-reform that rose from within Confucianism was the discussion to replace the Cheng-Zhu study of nature and principle, which could never be studied enough in a lifetime, with the Wang Yangming School, which was plain and simple.³⁶ When the dreams of forming a modern nation-state were dashed by Japanese colonial rule, the nation was summoned as the spirit. Bak Eunsik (1859–1925) declared that although the national body (*gukbeak* 國魄) may be lost, national sovereignty (*gukgwon* 國權) could be recovered as long as the national spirit (*gukhon* 國魂) was preserved (Bak 2002b, 440), and sought to overcome the crisis in reality by presenting the nation as a transcendental entity.³⁷ The history and culture unique to the nation was studied with hopes that preserving the spirit will someday lead to the restoration of national sovereignty even if the sovereignty of the state had been taken.

One of the pretexts Japan had put forward to justify colonization was to free Joseon from the shackles of China. An article titled “Religion and the State” (*Jonggyo wa gukka*) presented a counterargument based on comparative religious history against Japan's contempt that Korea had not been able to be independent for the 700 years following the interference by Yuan during the Goryeo dynasty. According to this article, the medieval period was an era of religion, during which the notion of religion was stronger than the notion of the state. Korea, therefore, had merely treated China, the suzerain country of Confucianism, with respect, just as the people in the West submitted to the Pope in Rome and the kings of many countries received approval of their kingship from the Pope.³⁸ At the same time, there were self-reflective contemplations saying that

30 *Dongnip sinmun*, January 26, 1897.

31 Yi Hangeong, “Jonggyo wa gukka” [Religion and the State], *Daehan hakhoe wolbo* 3, April 25, 1908, pp. 21–22.

32 Bak Heonyong, “Sahoe jinbo jae eo jonggyo ji hwangnip” [Social Progress Depends on the Establishment of Religion], *Daban heunghakbo* 2, April 20, 1909, pp. 7–11.

33 “Gak jonggyo ui gwangye” [The Relationship between Each Religion], *Jeguk sinmun*, February 7, 1906.

34 “Dap Kim Domyeong” [Reply to Kim Domyeong], Vol. 10 of *Amseo jip* [Collected Writings of Amseo Jo Geungseop].

35 “Gyeonggo yurim jegun” [Warning to All Confucianists], *Hwangseong sinmun*, January 12, 1909.

36 “Yugyo gusillon” [Essay on Confucian Reformation], *Seobuk hakhoe wolbo* 10, March 1909.

37 “Jeongsin euro doen gukka” [A State Formed by the Spirit], *Daehan maeil sinbo*, April 29, 1909.

38 “Han Il hapbyeongnonja ege goham (sok)” [To Those Arguing for the Annexation of Korea to Japan (sequel)], *Dahan maeil sinbo*, January 7, 1910.

Korea, unable to digest the religions and scholarship from other countries it had accepted into its own, had become the slaves of these imported religions and scholarships. This was also the context in which national nature (*gukseong* 國性) or national essence (*guksu* 國粹), which emphasized national thought and national spirit, was discussed.³⁹

Sin Chaeho acknowledged that religion was a large institution (*ildaegigwan* 一大機關) that moved the people in a good way but pointed to history and warned people that one must not become slaves of religion. He anticipated that the reformation of Confucianism and the expansion of Christianity could let them take over the role of a national religion.⁴⁰ In particular, Confucianism needed the ideology of civilization, while Christianity required national spirit.⁴¹ The political ideology of Confucianism, in which the fulfillment of the self was expanded to the society and state, such as the doctrine of governing others after self-cultivation, came into conflict with the historical task of Christianity, which went through the Protestant Reformation and sought to separate the church and the state. The modern religion of Korea was forced to separate religion and politics under the name of modernity, but the longing of the people was revealed through religion. The Japanese authorities banned the religious community from being involved in politics as a policy, and the missionaries during then had no choice but to tiptoe around the colonial authorities. The history of the West had already proved that religion and politics were inseparable. Religion was called the mother of politics in that the political reformation derived from the Protestant Reformation,⁴² and religion was also pointed as the cause of the innovations of the United Kingdom, the American independence, and the revolution of France.⁴³

Confucianism, which had enjoyed the status as the state religion during the Joseon dynasty, became one of the many religions among the influence

of the modern concept of religion. The Japanese authorities reorganized the State Academy (Seonggyungwan) as Academy of Studying Confucian Classics (Keigakuin), treated public county schools (*hyanggyo*) as educational institutions, thereby denying the religiosity of Confucianism. Despite the many movements to make Confucianism into a religion such as the Religion of Great Unity, the Religion of Confucius, and the Religion of the Great Ultimate, the Japanese did not recognize Confucianism as a religion. Confucianism was nothing but one of the resources to instill morality into the subjects of the empire following colonial policies. Making Confucianism non-religious and apolitical was an important line taken by the colonial policies. The only religions the Japanese recognized were Buddhism, Shintoism, and Christianity; the rest were all relegated to non-religions.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, Christianity was introduced as the driving force and religious model of a civilized country. Yun Chiho, who had led the efforts of Westernization, attributed the reason the nation was in a crisis to the way intellectuals and leaders had wasted their time and energy in absurd philosophical contemplations such as Confucian ethics and Buddhist ideals and how they scorned useful technology and practical morality.⁴⁵ Practical morality for him was none other than Christianity.

Although national sovereignty had been taken by the colonial rule by Japan, this did not mean the fervent desire to build a modern state had disappeared. The study of Western political systems to inspire national thought or the spiritual state found among ancient ideologies provided the foundation to stand up against the empire. The violation of the independence and autonomy of the state led to an interest in the religion and history unique to Korea such as Dangun and Gija as a way to unify national thought and bring the people together.⁴⁶ An article that examined the prospects of the religious community of Korea emphasized the importance of religion in the society of humankind and exhorted the need to study many religions, since religion formed the moral tone of the society and could even determine the rise and fall of a state, even if the superiority or inferiority of religion could not be determined by a single

39 "Jonggyogyo wa haksulgye ui gukseong" [National Nature of the Religious Community and the Academic Community], *Hwangseong sinmun*, January 8, 1910.

40 "21-segi sungunmin (sok)" [New People of the Twenty-first Century (sequel)], *Daehan maeil sinbo*, March 3, 1910.

41 "Yang jonggyoga e hyanghaya yogu hanora" [Demands to the Leaders of Both Religions], *Daehan maeil sinbo*, April 15, 1910.

42 "Jonggyo wa jeongchi ui gwangye" [The Relationship between Religion and Politics], *Hwangseong sinmun*, November 20, 1909.

43 "Jonggyo gachyeonk i wi jeongchi gachyeok ji wonin" [Religious Reformation is the Cause of Political Reform], *Daehan maeil sinbo*, October 11, 1908.

44 Residency-General of Joseon, "Jonggyo ui seonpo e gwanhan gyuchik" [Regulations on the Proclamation of Religions], December 1, 1906.

45 See entry for October 26, 1919, of Bak 2015.

46 "A Han ui jonggyo wa yeoksa" [Religion and History of Korea], *Hwangseong sinmun*, March 3, 1910.

standard. The first religion subject to this study was Confucianism, which had been designated as the state religion during the early modern period of Korea.⁴⁷ The article warned that Confucianism, however, was incompatible with the society of today due to its autocratic politics and the tendency to emulate the past despite over 500 years of moral edification and could in fact even be harmful. Regarding the movements to make Confucianism into a religion such as the Religion of Confucius, Religion of the Great Sages, Religion of the Great Unity, and Religion of the Great Ultimate, the article took a pessimistic stance, writing that they were nothing but efforts to maintain the class society and continue emulating the past.⁴⁸

The Historicity of Modern Korean Confucianism

As the modern ideologies of science and humanism of the West spread, the separation of humanistic studies and studies of nature, the enhancement of the status of science as a practical learning, and the rearrangement of traditional learning took place during the transition to modernity. Most of the concepts that had constituted the traditional knowledge system gradually disappeared not only from scholarly space but the realm of everyday life as well. The foreign studies and new cultures that filled the vacuum formed by this process demanded that traditional values and forms of conduct change. Although the study of the Way, which based itself on the orthodoxy of Cheng-Zhu study of principle and nature perceived the national crisis as a moral crisis and urged people to recover their inner nature and realize righteousness, their grand slogan of human imperatives was powerless in front of the plunder of imperialism. While Confucianism was singled out as the reason the state had been ruined, efforts to search for a new truth continued.

The status of Confucianism, which had remained firm all throughout the Joseon dynasty, was violently shaken by the dispute over old and new learning. This argument was a questioning of the academic universality of

Confucianism that demanded Confucianism to prove its *raison d'être* by itself while competing with Western learning. If the stance to preserve Eastern ways while adopting Western means had adhered to the values of Confucianism as a universal learning, Confucianism during the dispute over old and new learning now had to compete not only with technology and skills of the West but also against Western learnings that had already established their status as learning beyond technology and skill.

The acceptance of the concept of philosophy and religion accelerated the deconstruction of the knowledge system built around Confucianism. It was difficult to add the meaning of moral practice to *gyeokchi* and *gungni*, which were used to translate the terms philosophy and science, beyond the definition of observing things and investigating their principles and laws. Confucianism, which had once been regarded as comparable to Western philosophy, was subsequently blamed to be a hindrance to civilization and reframed as Confucian philosophy during the rearrangement of the knowledge system. The definition as Confucian philosophy, however, erased the unscientific area that Confucianism had formerly included. Similar to how the traditional knowledge system was rearranged under the name of philosophy, the acceptance of the concept of religion, in which Christianity was the universal religion of civilization, gave rise to skepticism of the religiosity of Confucianism. The socially and politically engaged nature of Confucianism was reduced to the area of philosophy. Although there were many attempts and movements to reform Confucianism from inside such as those by Bak Eunsik as well as movements to make Confucianism into a religion, they were unable to become socially influential. The colonial authorities used Confucianism as a tool, relegating it to a moral resource for the loyal subjects of the Japanese Empire by promoting the Academy of Studying Confucian Classics, recognized only Shintoism, Buddhism, and Christianity as religions, and controlled and oppressed all other religions. Although modern Korean Confucianism is currently regarded as part of the historical cultural heritage of Korea, the historicity of Confucianism during the transitional period to modernity is essential in contemplating modernity.

47 "Hanguk jonggyo gye ui jangnae" [The Future of the Korean Religious Community], *Daehan maeil sinbo*, May 15, 1910.

48 "Hanguk jonggyo gye ui jangnae" [The Future of the Korean Religious Community], *Daehan maeil sinbo*, May 17, 1910.

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Abstract

The world order, in which the modernity of the West constitutes what is universal, touted the advancement of civilization as the common law of nature to justify colonialism. Western scholarship poured into the vacuum of worldview formed by the disintegration of Sino-centrism. The response of modern Korean Confucian intellectuals took various forms. This article focuses on the arguments related to Confucianism and the transformation of the Confucian knowledge system following the acceptance of Western concepts. The status of Confucianism, which had been the state religion during the transitional period to modernity, continued down a path of decline, and its knowledge system was unable to function as the leading principle of the society. The shock brought on by the West was a civilizational transition that could not be resolved by the restoration of morality. The stance to preserve Eastern ways, or moral values, while adopting Western means, or scientific technology, was proposed as a response to the situation. In the dispute over old and new learning, however, Confucianism had to prove whether it could be the proper knowledge system that would satisfy the demands of civilizational advancement and historical progress. Confucianism resorted to the re-appropriation of the existing notion of practical learning, which referred to the scientific technology of the West. From the stance of reformists, Confucian ethics was a universal practical learning. The scientification of learnings brought into the concept of philosophy, which accelerated the changes in the knowledge system centered on Confucianism. When the term *gyeokchi*, or the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge, and *gungni*, or the exhaustive search for the principle, were used together as translations of the terms philosophy and science, it was difficult to add the meaning of moral practice beyond the definition as the observation of things and the investigation of principle. Confucianism, which was once regarded to the counterpart to Western philosophy, was pointed as an obstacle to civilization and became a Confucian philosophy during the process of the deconstruction of the knowledge system. Similar to how the traditional knowledge system was rearranged under the name of philosophy, the acceptance of the concept of religion, in which Christianity was the universal religion of civilization, gave rise to skepticism of the religiosity of Confucianism. The social and political teachings of Confucianism were regarded to be closer to philosophy. Although there were many attempts to reform Confucianism from

within including by Bak Eunsik as well as movements to make Confucianism into a religion, it was hard for these attempts to spread among the public and be socially influential. The colonial authorities instrumentalized Confucianism, relegating it to a moral resource for the loyal subjects of the Japanese Empire, recognizing only Shintoism, Buddhism, and Christianity as religions, and did not acknowledge Confucianism as a religion. Although Confucianism of modern Korea is now regarded as part of the historical cultural heritage, the historical significance of Confucianism during the transitional period to modernity is essential in contemplating modernity.

Keywords: Eastern ways and Western means, dispute of old and new learning, Confucianism, acceptance of the concepts of philosophy and religion, conceptual history (historical semantics)

