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Creating a Korean Philosophical Tradition: Pak Chong-hong and the Discomfiting Indispensability of European Thought*

Eunsu Cho

“Korean philosophy” or “Korean thought” emerged as an anti-colonial concept to establish the cultural identity of an oppressed nation. Starting in the 1930s, interest in *Shirhak*, presented as a “Korean” Confucian tradition analogous to the Enlightenment tradition of the West, typified this nationalist undertaking. For example, in studies of Chōng Yak-yong, it became a core controversy whether *Shirhak* thinkers sought to “recover” or “modernize” ancient learning. In this context, Pak Chong-hong, a post-war intellectual, is credited with elevating Korean thought to the level of a “valid discipline” while at the same time heeding the nationalist call. But the scope of Korean thought set by Pak has been challenged and broadened to include a more diverse representation of cultural traces from the past. New archetypes of Korean thought have gained currency, from the philosophy of T’oegye and Wonhyo as proud national assets, to Shamanism and folk beliefs as sources of Korean creativity. All these claims must be carefully contextualized. What is of interest is not that comparisons of *Shirhak* to Western Enlightenment are still prevalent, but how Western models were adapted to narrate the distinctiveness of the development of Korean thought. This paper will show how perceptions and agendas within the field of Korean philosophy have changed in response to both state and public pressures to identify an indigenous national philosophy and a uniquely Korean tradition.

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I. Introduction

In this paper, I trace the ways in which the field conceptualized as “Korean philosophy” (*Han ’guk ch’ŏrhak*) or “Korean thought” (*Han ’guk sasang*) was formed in the post-war period and later transformed in response to state and public pressures to identify an indigenous national philosophy and a uniquely Korean tradition. In its most inclusive usage, the term “Korean philosophy” can be defined as a loose reference to all philosophical activities and intellectual speculation achieved by Koreans or in Korea throughout history. However, a few more distinct usages can be demarcated as appearing in the context of our discussions, with a certain degree of overlap. The first refers to Korean philosophy as a combination of traditional Korean thought, which is largely Confucian or Buddhist. A second, more inclusive referent, defines Korean philosophy as all contemporary philosophical speculation in Korea. Finally, a stricter notion of Korean philosophy refers specifically to the practice of the discrete Western scholarly discipline of Philosophy by Koreans. In this article, our discussion will be focused on the definitions of Korean philosophy which imply both the encompassing, unified, and discursive formation that has existed “throughout history,” and the modern conceptualization of the distinctive brand of Korean philosophy that has emerged as an effort of reinventing tradition and national identity in post-war South Korea.

It is not the intention of this paper to offer another definition of Korean philosophy, or argue about what topics definitions of Korean philosophy should extend to include, but to show a history of how the definitions and extensions have been changed. I will illustrate that post-liberation developments in the work of major intellectuals such as Pak Chong-hong (1903-1976) mark the inception of the study of Korean philosophy as a modern academic scholarly discipline searching for a Korean identity and philosophical uniqueness (in terms of Western philosophy) in traditional Korean thought. I find their prototype in the

Chosŏn-hak undong (Korean Studies movement) which generated fervent scholarly discussions on Korean thought during the Japanese colonial period in the 1930s. Along with these arguments, I will focus on how the field of Korean philosophy came to play an increasingly significant role in the production of national identity in post-war South Korea.

2. Introduction of Western Philosophy by Confucian Scholars and Their Responses to It

Korea's first encounter with Western philosophy began far earlier than the late 19th century, though indirectly via China. As far back as 1631, Chŏng Tu-won brought from Beijing an anthology in Chinese on Catholic doctrine by Jesuit missionaries. In this book, the term "philosophia" was transliterated into Chinese characters and defined using Neo-Confucian terminology as "a study on understanding the principle of matters and pursuing truth."¹

First used by the Japanese philosopher Nishi Amane in 1872 to describe Western philosophy, the same two Chinese characters, *che-süeh*, pronounced *tetsugaku* in Japanese and *ch'ŏrhak* in Korean respectively, have become the standard term used to designate "philosophy" throughout East Asia.² The Sino-Korean term *ch'ŏrhak* began to be used in the 1910s in books on Western philosophy written by Confucian scholars. Before the circulation of this neologism in Korea, *kyŏngmul-hak* (literally, the discipline of *kyŏngmul* (ko-wu in Chinese), a key neo-Confucian term meaning "understanding [the principle of] matters," or a transliteration of "philosophia" in Chinese characters was used.

Yi In-jae (1870-1929) wrote *Ch'ŏrhak kobyŏn* or *Treatise on Philosophy*, in 1912. Along with the study of Kant by Yi Chŏng-jik

1. Cho Yo-han, "han'guk ūi hak'ung hakmaek - ch'ŏrhak" [Scholarly Styles and Lineage in Korean Philosophy], *Wolgan Chosŏn* (Chosŏn Monthly), February 1982, 329-330. Recited from Kim Yŏ-su, "Han'guk ch'ŏhakūi hyŏnhwang" [Current Status of Korean Philosophy]. In Shim Jae-ryong ed., *Han'guk esŏ ch'ŏrhak hanūn chase* [Views on How to do Philosophy in Modern Korea: A Korean Methodological Inquiry into the Study of Philosophy], (Seoul: Chipmun-dang, 1986, 1987, 343-385), 356.

(1840-1910),³ another Confucian scholar at the end of the Chosŏn dynasty, this book is one of the first studies on Western philosophy. Yi In-jae studied the Confucian classics under the guidance of Kwak Chong-sŏk (1846-1919) who was from the School emphasizing the *li*

2. However, the subsequent development of designations for this term were quite different. According to H. Gene Blocker's recent study, *Japanese Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), the Japanese considered *tetsugaku* (philosophy) as a strictly Western product standing alongside other Western disciplines. In China, through continued debate, *che-hsüeh* came to have a broader definition. While the Japanese used this term to refer only to Western thinkers, the Chinese ultimately came to accept that it should be used to refer not only to the likes of Aristotle and Kant, but also to ancient Asian philosophers, including their own, Kongzi and Mengzi. In China, too, many scholars initially thought that *che-hsüeh* was one of the Western sciences and was therefore previously nonexistent in China. However, as it became clear, partially through the efforts of John Dewey and Bertrand Russell who visited China just after World War I, that Western philosophy was not a science but a metaphysical and speculative world view based largely on a sense of cultural values, Chinese scholars began to see greater similarities between Western philosophy and ancient Confucianism, Mohism, Taoism, and so on. Through the debates on this issue of definition in 1922 and 23, dominant figures such as Liang Shuming, who used *che-hsüeh* for the first time in his *The Civilization of Orient and Occident and Their Philosophies*, and Chang Chunmai (Carson Chang, *Science and the Philosophy of Life*, 1925), Chinese intellectuals reached the consensus that much of ancient Chinese writing (Confucian, Taoist, and some Buddhist texts) should indeed be considered *che-hsüeh* and that *che-hsüeh* must be divided into Western, Indian, and Chinese, each representing the different value orientations of these different cultures (Blocker 2001: 4). For an explanation of the different paths in those two countries, Blocker provides that Confucianism was never an indigenous thought to Japan. In China, by contrast, the resistance to Western learning and the loyalty to Chinese traditions was much stronger, leading to a long and lively debate from between 1880 to the 1920s. Finally ending in a compromise, they embraced Western science and technology while retaining traditional Chinese moral and social thought (i.e., "Chinese philosophy"), especially Confucianism. For the Chinese, whose cultural identity is enduringly linked with ancient Chinese thought systems, the shift from Chinese to Western has been far less easy than in Japan, and far less uniform (Blocker 2001: 5).
3. The term *chŏrhak* appeared for the first time in Korea in a study of Kant by Yi Chŏng-jik, "Kang ssi ch'ŏrhaksŏl taeryak" [A Brief Thesis on the Philosophical Theory of Mr. Kang (Kant)], contained in his anthology of writings. He traveled to China at the age of 27 while accompanying a group of envoys. In Beijing he was exposed to the broad knowledge and intellectual foment of Ch'ing China and learned of new trends in Neo-Confucianism, as well as Western philosophy. His essay on Kant (written between 1903, the year that Liang's book was published, and 1910, the year that he died) is known to have followed Liang Ch'i-ch'ao's *Yin-ping shih wen-chi* [Anthology of the Ice-Drinkers' Studio]. It is noted that much as Liang had used Buddhist Hua-yen philosophy in interpreting Kant, who he thought higher than Chu Hsi, but Yi compared Kant with Chu Hsi's "understanding matters" (*ko-wu*) and evaluated that they are comparable. See Pak Chong-hong, "Yi Chŏng-jik ū Kant yŏn'gu" [A Study on Kant by Yi Chŏng-jik], in *Pak Chong-hong chŏnjip* [Collected Works of Pak Chong-hong], (Seoul: Hyŏngsŭl ch'ulp'ansa, 1980). This edition was published in five volumes. However, a revised and expanded edition was published by Minŭm-sa Publishing in 1998 in seven volumes. Citations follow the revised version), vol. 5, 285.

(principle) of T'oegyeg Yi Hwang, and followed his teacher's position criticizing the School emphasizing *chi* (force), founded by Yulgok Yi I in the sixteenth century. At the same time, he was exposed to newly available books from China, including those on Western philosophy. He said: "My teacher [Mr. Kwak] advised me not to shut myself off from reading these new books, and explore them, even though from the lofty point of view of standard Confucianism this (Western philosophy) might be considered negatively. I thought there must be a reason for the advancement of Western civilization, so learning about the root of their politics should be a short cut to learn about their advancement. I delved into law and governance to learn that their advancement sprang from their philosophy."⁴

His *Ch'ŏrhak kobyŏn* is a history of Greek philosophy, written with references to books on the history of philosophy available from China, such as those authored by philosophers in Japan, France, and Liang Ch'i-ch'ao's *Yin-ping shih wen-chi* (Anthology of the Ice-Drinkers' Studio).⁵ Yi In-jae explains that the Greek term "philosophia" now translated as *ch'ŏrhak* refers to a love of knowledge, concerned with investigating the principles of things and matters and explaining how matters exist and function, and also provides a foundation for science which is about studying the principle of matters and seeking practical uses." Also, Yi compares Socrates to Lao-tzu in the East and praises Aristotle, likening his philosophy to "Our Way" (Confucianism).⁶

Yi's teacher Kwak Chong-sŏk, one of the most renowned Confucian scholars in Korea at the time and regarded as the "last Confucian scholar of the Chosŏn dynasty," himself wrote an epilogue to Yi's book and stated his view on Western philosophy like this: "Philosophy is the root of science, and Greece is the teacher of Europe. Visiting one's ancestor

4. Yi In-jae, "sang Myŏnu sŏnsaeng" [To Mr. Myŏnu Kwak Chong-sŏk], in *Sŏngwa-jip* (Collection of Sŏngwa Yi In-jae's writings), volume 2. All translations from Korean are mine unless otherwise noted.
5. The influence of Liang to Korean intellectuals went beyond Yi. A Buddhist monk activist and reformist Han Yong-un also draws upon Liang when he mentions Kant and Rousseau in his 1910 "Chosŏn pulgyo yushin-ron" [Manifesto to reform Korean Buddhism].
6. Pak Chong-hong, "Yi In-jae ron" [On Yi In-jae], in *Pak Chong-hong chŏnjip*, vol. 5, 424-434. See also Hŏ Nam-jin, "Sŏyang ch'ŏrhak suyong e ttarŭn chŏnt'ong ch'ŏrhak ŭi taeŭng mit chŏn'gae" [Responses of Traditional Thought to the Introduction of Western Philosophy and its Developments], *Ch'ŏrhak Sasang* [Philosophical Thought] 8 (1998), 35-82.

is the same as visiting the offspring, and scolding a teacher is the same as scolding his/her disciples.” In other words, without understanding Greek philosophy, modern European civilization cannot be comprehended. At the same time, he issued a criticism of Western civilization observing that while their epistemological knowledge had deepened and developed from Thales to Socrates to Plato and Aristotle, humanity and morality have not been thoroughly investigated or speculated upon.”⁷ The rest of Kwak’s writing strives to clarify the distinction between Korean and Western cultural traditions and characterizes Korea in terms of morality and virtue versus the West’s utility and technology.

The statement of Kwak and others is representative of the attitude Confucian scholars in the 1910s had toward Western philosophy: that Western philosophy is merely about science and utility whereas their own thought is a holistic knowledge of man and the world, buttressed by a comprehensive value system aimed towards the humanistic development of individuals and society. However, his attitude toward the West diverged drastically from the initial responses to the West of Confucian scholars (and much of the general public as well) in the face of the threat of the Western power in the later nineteenth century. Having going through the Japanese invasion of the country, from Queen Min’s assassination in 1895 to the collapse of the Chosŏn dynasty in 1910, he became more open to Western civilization, as reflected in his attempt to negotiate with the West. This change in position culminated in his writing a letter signed by 137 Confucian scholars, in which he addressed the Western countries in a highly respectful way petitioning for the independence of Korea at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.

The encounter with Western philosophy did not only entail an appraisal of new, foreign thoughts. When Western philosophy was first being introduced in the late nineteenth century through the early twentieth century, Confucian scholars concerned themselves with the nature of the relationship between this philosophy (*chŏrhak*) and their own

7. Kwak Chong-sŏk, “sŏ Yi Yŏjae Chŏrhak kobyŏn hu” [writing an epilogue Yi Yŏjae (In-jae)’s *Chŏrhak kobyŏn*], in *Sŏngwa-jip* volume 4. Re-quoted from *Pak Chong-hong chŏnjip*, volume 5, 408.

philosophical traditions, i.e. *tohak* (study of the Way) or *ihak* (study of principle). *Tohak* and *ihak* were terms that had been used for many centuries in East Asian Neo-Confucian culture to refer to its tradition of moral and metaphysical inquiry, traditions that came to be seen by traditional scholars as the East Asian counterpart to Western “philosophy.” To them, *tohak* or *ihak* not only included the knowledge of practical matters but also a way of understanding the universe and earth, as well as developing humanity and morality.⁸

There was also a more radical strand of cultural reappraisal, one less invested in preserving tradition. These scholars felt that the nostalgic efforts at rehabilitating traditional thought was both misguided and counterproductive. Young Korean intellectuals who were becoming acquainted with Western civilization directly or through Japanese eyes insisted that the underlying cause for Korea’s situation as a weak and vulnerable dynasty could be located in its cultural and philosophical tradition. For these Western minded intellectuals an admiration of Western civilization was coupled with a harsh criticism of Confucianism.

Yu Kil-chun (1856-1914), who was the first person who went for overseas studies to Japan as well as to the United States, in his travelogue cum orientation to the West, *Söyu kyönmun* (Travels in the West), published in 1895, briefly mentions Western philosophy, which he called *kyöngmul-hak*, a Neo-Confucian term meaning “understanding matters.) He asserted that Western philosophy provided the spiritual backbone for Western society as a system developed for investigating the reality of things and exploring principle and function. According to Yu, the intellectual horizons opened up by Western philosophy enabled the West to achieve a glorious civilization.⁹

Confucianism and Confucianists were taken to task for what was considered their vain conventionalism, their nostalgic view of history,

8. This encounter did not merely end with a recognition of similarity between what was called philosophy in the West and the ancient traditions of the East. The superiority of the traditional thought over the Western philosophy is attested to in much of these scholar’s writings, culminating in Kwak’s ending his epilogue “I firmly believe that there will be a time where our ‘Confucianism’ will revive in the West in the future.”

9. Yu Kil-chun, *Söyu kyönmun* chapter 13 (Tokyo: 1895); Reprinted, (Seoul: Kyöngin Munhwasa, 1969), 350.

and their tendency towards political factionalism, all of which had led to the demise of the dynasty and obstructed its transformation into a modern nation-state. The reformer Yun Ch'i-ho (1865-1945), for example, asked the following rhetorical question in 1895:

What has Confucianism done for Korea? With diffidence yet conviction I dare say that it has done very little, if anything for Korea. What Korea might have been without Confucian teachings, nobody can tell. But what Korea is with them we too well know. Behold Korea, with her oppressed masses, her general poverty, treacherous and cruel officers, her dirt and filth, her degraded women, her blighted families — behold all this and judge for yourselves what Confucianism has done for Korea.¹⁰

Those reform minded intellectuals advocating *kaehwa* or *munmyōng-kaehwa* (Enlightenment or Civilization-Enlightenment) who emerged during the 1880s and continued to be present during the 1890s, shared this highly critical attitude toward Confucianism. The more radical of the reformists, such as Yun Ch'i-ho and Sō Chae-p'il (1864-1951), were among those more extensively exposed to Western civilization¹¹ and began their activism with frontal assaults on Confucianism. Through the newspaper *The Independent*, founded and edited by Yun and Sō, Sō Chae-p'il likewise poured scorn on the Confucian classics, attributing China's and Korea's weakness directly to their malignant influence.¹²

As seen in the examples noted above, responses toward Western philosophy and civilization at the time of Korea's earlier encounter with the West varied from those thoroughly impressed with Western disciplines and civilization to the more cautionary, and even outright

10. *The Korean Repository* 2 (Seoul: Trilingual Press, 1895), 403. Re-quoted from Vipin Chandra, "The Korean Enlightenment: A Re-examination," *Korea Journal* 22-5 (May 1982), 17.

11. Sō Chae-p'il was educated at Lafayette College and later obtained a Doctor of Medicine degree from George Washington University. Yun Ch'i-ho received his higher education at Vanderbilt and Emory Universities.

12. *The Independent*, Seoul, June 6, 1896 and August 6, 1896. Re-quoted from Vipin Chandra, *ibid.*, 17.

hostile positions of some Confucianists. These intellectuals' affinity to Western values was often in an inverse relationship to the degree of allegiance felt toward their own intellectual traditions. This is evident in comparing the extreme antagonism towards traditional thought of thoroughly Western minded intellectuals with the majority of Confucian intellectuals in the late nineteenth century who were opposed to any adoption of Western civilization, and voiced their antireformist views in the political anti-Japanese movement and opposition to encroaching Western imperialism. In the end, such recalcitrance amongst the Confucian elite contributed to the yielding of the country to foreign powers, and led to the more tempered response of Confucian scholars who proposed a critical adoption of certain elements of Western thought with the main concern of protecting the ancient value system. Nonetheless, in general, we can say the encounter with the West and Japan intensified the increasingly harsh treatment the traditions of *tohak* and *ihak* were to face from Korean intellectuals.

3. Reinterpreting Tradition and the Emergence of the Discourse on *Shirhak*

When the Protectorate Treaty was signed with Japan in 1905 and Japanese influence penetrated into every aspect of Korean life, Japanese colonial scholarship took up this discourse on Korean Confucianism and embarked on a more general criticism of traditional Korean thought, including Buddhism.¹³ The imposition of the Protectorate, however, resulted in a sense of betrayal among Korean intellectuals, and brought hopes of a political alliance between equals in East Asia to an end. Instigated by the shattered solidarity with Japan, some Korean reformists broadened their reformist agenda to include anti-Japanese activities. The nationalistic movement that evolved after that point partook in re-inventing Korean traditional thought in an effort to distinguish it from that of Japan and to promote a national identity.

Emerging in 1905 and lasting through the 1910s, the most conspicuous and active social trend of intellectuals advocated the consolidation of power of the nation based on the theory of social Darwinism. This

trend was led by intellectuals such as Hyŏn Sang-yun (1893-) and Song Chin-u (1890-1945) who had come back from studying at Japanese universities where they encountered a plethora of new ideas.¹⁴ Overwhelmed by the modern civilization and capitalistic culture of a Japan developed through an adoption of Western thought and practice, they wanted to build a similar state in Korea, with the idea that this would lay the foundation for regaining Korean sovereignty. Their theory of consolidation of power complimented their advocacy for the abolishment of old thought and ancient customs because in order to consolidate power it was required to foster the development of industry and universal modern education. In their eyes, such development was only possible with the abolishment of the old value system and customs. Here, condemnation of the old value system was specifically targeted at Confucianism and traditional customs, such as the *yangban* class system, early and unequal marriage, and excessive ancestor worship among others. Confucianism was portrayed as out of date, especially the Confucianism of the Chosŏn period. Thus, these scholars pressed for its eradication as soon as possible. In its place, they advocated the so-called “new thought,” that of the modern Western world.¹⁵

The harsh criticism toward Confucianism is also found in the group of nationalist historians such as Shin Ch’ae-ho (1880-1936) and Pak

13. Generally speaking, throughout the colonial period Buddhism received less attention from nationalist scholars and historians than did Confucianism or *Shirhak*. The negative portrayals of Korean Buddhism at this time are reflected in the language employed by colonial historians: Buddhism was characterized as “excessive,” “extravagant,” or “socially ineffective” and “empty” in terms of its doctrine, and “weak” in its social and political influence. The colonial discourse on Buddhism in the 1920s characterized Buddhism in terms of the aristocratic and extravagant attributes of Koryŏ Buddhism. This accusation had been made since the early Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910) when Confucian bureaucrats wanted to eradicate Buddhist influence on the court and the public alike by limiting the economic assets of Buddhist society. Given the vehemently anti-Buddhist policies held by Confucian bureaucrats, and notwithstanding the persistent revival of Buddhist practices among members of the royal inner chambers and among commoners, the status of Buddhism remained rather low throughout the Chosŏn dynasty. However, neither the status of the clerical group nor the anti-Buddhist policy enforced by the government should be understood as being reflective of Buddhist practice among the people. Colonial historians, however, criticized Chosŏn Confucian scholar-officials as contributing to a stagnant nation that was dependent (on China). We should say, therefore, that they took advantage of these Neo-Confucian polemics as a double-edged sword to define both Koryŏ and Chosŏn Buddhism.
14. Pak Ch’an-sŭng, *Han’guk kŭndae chŏngch’i sasang-sa* [History of Political Ideas in Modern Korea], (Seoul: Yŏksa pip’yŏngsa, 1992), 109-111.

Ŭn-shik (1859-1925) who, unlike the critics of the earlier period, had not gone overseas to study. These nationalists, while criticizing Confucianism for its chauvinism and dependency on China, tried to find the root of Korean thought in the indigenous thought, “Sōngyo,”¹⁶ a philosophical-cum-religious Taoist tradition of Korea, regarded to have existed even before Confucianism was introduced to Korea. Their nationalist historiography attempted to trace the history of Korea back to the earliest time, to Ko Chosŏn or Old Chosŏn, the most ancient kingdom on the peninsula, which had been excluded from both official Korean history as well as contemporary colonialist historiography. In addition, this nationalist historiography focused on the Tan’gun foundation myth as the life spring of Korean culture, and the three Kingdoms period as the archetype of lively and dynamic Korean cultural tradition. Shin Ch’ae-ho linked the decline of the nation to the advance of Sinitic culture, represented by Confucianism, to the Korean peninsula.

The shift in perspective that brought drastic change in their outlook to tradition and called attention to their own intellectual tradition comes in 1933 as part of the Chosŏn-*hak* (Korean Studies)¹⁷ movement, which was led by the historiographical work of nationalist scholars and intellectuals such as An Chae-hong (1891-1965), Ch’oe Nam-sŏn (1890-1957), and Chŏng In-bo (1892-1950).¹⁸ The term Chosŏn-*hak* was first used by Ch’oe Nam-sŏn, modeled after the usage of China-*hak* (Chinese Studies) and passionately advocated by An Chae-hong. The movement emerged as an anti-colonial formulation, aimed at promoting Korean identity and pride and investigating the unique cultural tendency of Chosŏn (Korea) while subjectively overcoming the “specific inferior status of Korea in order to understand Korea in the context of

15. Ironically, this empowerment movement continued to merge later into the so-called “culture movement” in the 1920s by right-wing nationalists, eventually coming in line with the Japanese colonial government’s temporary promotion of their “cultural policy.”
16. The most popular subjects of study during the colonial period were indigenous ideologies such as Shamanism and “Sōngyo.” These were given more attention and emphasized by both nationalists and colonial historians as the roots of Korean thought.
17. Han Yŏng-u, “An Chae-hongŏi shin-minjokjuŏiwa sahak” [Neo-Nationalism of An Chae-hong and his historical theory], *Han’guk tongnip undong-sa yŏn’gu* [Study of the History of the Independence Movement of Korea] 1 (1987): 262-265.
18. Pang Ki-jung, *Han’guk kŏnhŏndaesasangsa yŏn’gu* [A Study of Intellectual History in Modern Korea], (Seoul: Yŏksa pip’yŏng-sa, 1992), 113.

the world.”¹⁹

The movement revolved particularly around the scholarly re-discovery of Chŏng Yak-yong (1762-1836), the Confucian scholar of the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century who wrote on reformist ideas attuned to the specific social and political situation of Korea in his time. Intellectuals in the 1930s studied and wrote about the thought of Chŏng Yak-yong and other *Shirhak* scholars that were expressed in their various exegetical writings and essays.²⁰ The thought of his and other Confucian reformists during the time was called *Shirhak*, or Practical Learning, and was praised as a progressive and practical thought derived from Confucianism. Thus it could be seen not as a break from tradition, but as a new mode of Confucian interpretation. In this way, *Shirhak* assumed crucial importance as a field of study in the Chosŏn-*hak* movement that both identified and valorized a proud Korean Confucian tradition, while serving as a basis for a progressive reformulation of the present.

The existence of a public interest in *Shirhak* as a possible remedy for the political crises of the early period of imperial aggression was demonstrated on numerous occasions as early as the late nineteenth century. For example, King Kojong is said to have commissioned the *Yŏyudangjip* — a collection of Chŏng Yak-yong’s work — in 1885. In 1899, Chang Chi-yŏn established a publishing house, Kwangmun-sa, which published Chŏng Yak-yong’s *Mogmin shimsŏ*, *Hŏmhŏm shimsŏ*, and others to make such texts more available to the public.

It was during this period of the 1930s that *Shirhak* was proffered as

19. An Chae-hong, “Chosŏnhakŭi munje” [Issues in Korean Studies], *Shin Chosŏn* [The New Korea] 7 (1934): 2-4. Re-quoted from Pang Ki-jung, *Han’guk kŏnhyŏndae sasang-sa yŏn’gu* [A Study of the Intellectual History in Modern Korea], (Seoul: Yŏksa pip’yŏng-sa, 1992), 114.
20. Originally signifying “practical” or “real” learning as opposed to the “empty” talk of Buddhism and Taoism, the term *Shirhak* (practical learning) began appearing in Korean historiographies in the 1920s. Nonetheless, it was after the liberation from Japan during the 1950s that *Shirhak* became an official, fixed term used to denote the thought of reformist Confucianists as a whole. Terms like *Shirhak*, *Shirhak* thought, or *Shirhak* scholar, were used as a standardized term even though those so-called *Shirhak* scholars of the eighteen centuries, the more reformist minded included, would never have identified themselves or their works as *Shirhak*. Besides the term *Shirhak*, *Shilsagushihak* (a study of utilizing matters and seeking truth) and other synonyms were also used in the 1920s and 30s to delineate a uniform social movement that took place from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries by those Neo-Confucian scholars.

the prime example of a uniquely “Korean” Confucian tradition, analogous to the Enlightenment tradition in the West. 1935 marked the 100-year anniversary of Chǒng’s death and a special issue of the journal *Shin Chosŏn* (The New Korea) was dedicated to him.²¹ The following year saw the publication of Chǒng Yak-yong’s collected works.²² An Chae-hong’s study, for example, depicted Chǒng Yak-yong’s thought as articulating a new movement in response to domestic social pressures.²³ Perhaps as way to deflect this increasing interest in native traditional thought, and thus pointing to the increasing symbolic power of Chǒng, Japanese colonialist scholars such as Fujitsuka Rin and Takahashi Tōru made efforts to counter such work, pointing to Chinese Ch’ing dynasty factionalist scholarship, Catholicism, and other aspects of the Western tradition as the stimulants for the emergence of *Shirhak*.²⁴

4. Institutionalized Study of Western Philosophy and New Definitions of Philosophy in Post-liberation Korean Academia

Despite the enthusiastic, yet sporadic, efforts at reinterpreting traditional thinking, this discussion did not thoroughly penetrate institutional academia. In 1926, a department of philosophy was created at Kyōngsōng (Keijō) Imperial University,²⁵ with courses taught predominantly by Japanese professors. Following the completion of their undergraduate work, approximately twenty members of this first generation of philosophy students went abroad to pursue higher degrees in Germany, France, the U.S., and Japan while others continued their studies at Kyōngsōng. By the early 1930s, students who had gone overseas were coming back with advanced degrees. In 1933, they joined with

21. *Shin Chosŏn* 12 (1935). Contributors to this issue included Yi Kōn-bang, Paek Nam-un, Chǒng In-bo, An Chae-hong, and Paek Nak-chun.
22. Chǒng In-bo and An Chae-hong were the editors for the collection.
23. *Shin Chōsŏn* 12 (1935).
24. Chǒng Ch’ang-nyōl, “Shirhak sasang yōn’guŭi chaengjōmgwa kwaje” [Issues and Tasks for Research on Shirhak Thought], in *Han’guk sasang ūi shimch’ōng yōn’gu* [Comprehensive Research on the History of Korean Thought], (Seoul: Usōk, 1987), 306-7.
25. Pak Chong-hong, Shin Nam-ch’ōl and Pak Ch’i-u would number among the graduates of this department.

those who had remained in Seoul to form the Association for Philosophical Research (Ch'ōrhak yōn'guhoe), the first organization of its kind. That same year, they began to publish a journal for the organization, *Ch'ōrhak* (Philosophy). Not a single article published in *Ch'ōrhak* dealt with traditional thought. Traditional thought was not regarded as “philosophy,” that is, a systematized, articulated and sophisticated form of thought. The term “philosophy” was reserved for Western thought.

In the 1930s, two members of this first generation of Korean philosophers, An Ho-sang (1902-1999) and Pak Chong-hong (1903-1976), emerged to play leading roles in their field and to contribute to the shaping of the social milieu in which they lived. An was trained in Germany and Pak in Korea, but both specialized in the study of Hegel and logic. While the paths taken by these two philosophers resemble each other in many ways, certain critical differences appeared and our examination of the field of philosophy in post-liberation South Korea will therefore center on their work.

An Ho-sang was renowned for his textbooks *Introduction to Philosophy and Introduction to Logic*, both of which were published during the colonial period and reprinted following liberation. These books garnered widespread popularity, achieving must-read status among the younger generation. Following a brief stint at Posōng College and a subsequent move to Seoul National University, An became the first Minister of Education of the newly-formed Republic of Korea, a post he held from 1948 to 1950.

Following liberation, An's scholarly activities shifted towards discovering and promoting a uniquely Korean philosophy, hence his works on prehistoric Korean spiritualism, Tan'gun, and the *hwarang* (“flower of youth,” an organization of young men in the Shilla dynasty).²⁶ An also established the Students' National Defense League (*Hakto hoguktan*) as part of his anti-Communist campaign. In 1950, An stated the following in his ultra-nationalist “Basic Principles of Democratic

26. An Ho-sang, *Minjok tongnipūi ch'ōrhakchōk wollli* [Philosophical Principles of National Independence], (Seoul: Paedal Munhwa Yōn'guwon, 1971); An Ho-sang, *The Ancient History of the Korea-Dong-I race: Creator of East Asian Culture* (Seoul: Institute of Baedal Culture, 1974).

Oneness”:

At this moment, our domestic and foreign situation is overwhelmed by chaos. Our new nation needs a new world-view and a new philosophy. What should be the grounds on which we establish criteria to measure our ideas and actions regarding politics, education, economics, culture, and morality? The answer is the nation [*minjok*]. Our noble ideals and efforts to contribute to world civilization should take as its starting point national unification, national freedom, and national honor. We are One. One nation has the same blood, the same destiny, and the same ideology. We can persevere only by means of this national oneness... What about democracy? Democracy in itself is not good enough to be our leading principle. The democracy that has gained currency these days will flow away; it will be too weak and shallow to serve as a leading idea, a persevering path for our nation.²⁷

An’s “democratic oneness” (*ilminjuūi*) would develop into a “democratic nationalism” (*minju minjokjuūi*), eventually merging with his philosophy of Tan’gun and the Dong-I (Korean) race as outlined in *The Ancient History of the Korea-Dong-I Race: Creator of East Asian Culture* (1974). This text, which begins with a picture of the South Korean national flag and ends with pictures of Koguryō tombs and Koryō celadons, is replete with ultra nationalist/fascist sentiments expressed in the form of racial distinction, as the title suggests.

After liberation from Japan, while An’s philosophical definition moved away from philosophy as a Western product towards his own ultra-nationalistic political ideology, Pak Chong-hong brought a great shift in the definition of philosophy, expanding it to include the study of traditional thought and establishing the field of Korean philosophy in academia. In the process, Pak rose to a position of absolute authority in the field of philosophy following the Korean War, and is Korea’s most representative first generation philosopher, evident in the respect, repu-

27. An Ho-sang, *Ilminjuūi ponbat’ang* (Basic Principles of Democratic Oneness) (Seoul: Ilminjuūi Yōn’gu-won, 1950), 76.

tation, and authority that he enjoyed throughout his life. As the case of Pak Chong-hong makes clear, the impact of individual philosophers was immense.

Trained at Kyōngsōng (Keijō) Imperial University's Department of Philosophy during the colonial period, where he studied Hegel, Kant, and Heidegger, Pak was one of that program's first graduates. After liberation, he taught at his alma mater (renamed Seoul National University) and began to advocate his version of "Korean philosophy" through his publications and the university curriculum. At the same time, essays written by Pak in his later years demonstrate an anti-imperialist slant, giving an account of his colonial experiences, including his arrest by the Japanese secret police.²⁸ Pak stated clearly that his philosophical interests were grounded in a recognition of social and existential realities. In "An Inquiry into the Starting Point for Philosophizing," Pak details the ways in which philosophical inquiry should begin with a consideration of the unjust "reality" of colonial Korea.²⁹ Elsewhere, he discusses the "practical ground of philosophizing," demonstrating that the focus of his philosophical investigations is on the subject of reality and the praxis of theory.³⁰ Pak, however, followed a course different from that of his Marxist colleague, Pak Ch'i-u, and became a nationalist. Indeed, recalling an encounter with one of his best friends who was rumored to be a Marxist, Pak writes that after staying up all night engaged in discussion, the two had to depart on opposing paths.³¹

Notwithstanding the nationalist agenda evident during the 1930s, the major trend in philosophical study in colonial Korea was dialectical materialism. Not only was it the most actively pursued subject by intel-

28. In one of these essays, Pak also recalls that the one glance he got from Yō Un-hyōng, a socialist and nationalist leader who was in prison at that time, completely changed his life. "P'yōngbōmhan saenghwal sok'e ch'ōrhakūl" [The Philosophy in Ordinary Daily Life], *Toksō saenghwal* [Reading Life], June (1977). Re-printed in the *Pak Chong-hong chōnjip*, vol. 6, 294.

29. "An Inquiry into the Starting Point of Philosophizing," in *Ch'ōrhak* 1 (1933). Reprinted in the *Pak Chong-hong chōnjip*, vol. 1, 317-331.

30. Pak Chong-hong, "Ch'ōrhak hanūn kōtūi shilch'ōnjōk chiban" [Practical Ground of Philosophizing], *Ch'ōrhak* [Philosophy] 1-2 (1934). Reprinted in the *Pak Chong-hong chōnjip*, vol. 1, 332-348.

31. Pak Chong-hong, "Chinaonnalūi chubyōnesō" [On the Margins of Days Gone By], in the *Pak Chong-hong chōnjip*, vol. 6, 272.

lectuals during this period, it continued to be the focus of study following liberation. Korean intellectuals were enchanted by the conceptual schematics of dialectical materialism and hoped that it would contribute to an understanding of the nature of imperialism. Coming as it did in the midst of a tumultuous global political scene heavily influenced by Fascism and national expansion, there was hope that such philosophical study would also forge a path for liberation.

Following the Korean War, most scholars reacted to the former popularity of Marxism by occupying themselves with inquiries into German idealism, existentialism, pragmatism, and analytical philosophies. The shift in philosophical interest away from Marxism was also partly due to extreme censorship after the war. Founded in 1953, the Korean Philosophical Association reflected the philosophical interests of the scholarly community. There was considerable public interest as well. Young people, who felt devastated by war and oppressed by various societal problems, readily welcomed the numerous textbooks on Western philosophy and existentialism that appeared in this period. The fact that *Sasanggye* (World of Thought), one of the most popular political journals in the 1950s, included an article on a philosophical subject in nearly every monthly issue provides ample evidence of this trend.

During this time of the 1950s Pak Chong-hong's interest in traditional Korean thought emerged, and he became a pioneer in the investigation of Korean traditional thought. Making use of his proficiency in classical Chinese, Pak engaged in the study of such Korean classics as dynastic histories and the works of the sixteenth century Confucian scholar T'oegye Yi Hwang. These investigations resulted in his "*Book of Means and the Dialectic*" (1957), an article that is but one example of his lifelong passion to synthesize Western philosophy and traditional Korean thought. The emergence in the 1950s of academic discourse and forums on the identity of East Asian and Korean thought in relation to Western philosophy can be attributed to Pak's efforts.

Pak Chong-hong's "rediscovery" of Korean thought set the stage for its elevation to the level of a "valid discipline." Published in 1958, Pak's epoch-making article on Korean philosophy, his "Preliminary Essay on the Study of Korean Thought," was the first of its kind making the case for a distinctive form of Korean thought and identity. Pak wrote that,

“It would be absurd if someone, without giving any valid reason, said there was no unique philosophical system in Korea.”³² Describing Korean Confucianism and Buddhism as treasures awaiting excavation, Pak eloquently stated that it should be mandatory for Koreans to explore Korean philosophy and to establish Korean philosophy as a proper discipline.³³

Pak’s article inspired subsequent discussions among scholars on the identity and definition of Korean thought. In 1959, for example, Yi Sang-ŭn (1905-1976), a philosophy professor at Korea University, offered a critique of Hyŏn Sang-yun’s *History of Korean Confucianism* (1948). As mentioned earlier, Hyŏn was famous for the severe criticism and condemnation toward Confucianism he published in various journals in the 1910s. He continued his attack in his *History*, maintaining that the Confucianism of the Chosŏn period was responsible for Korea’s low level of industrialization. Hyŏn further argues that although Confucianism contributed significantly to the development of a sense of human dignity in Korea, it must also be held accountable for many of the country’s more corrupt characteristics, including flunkyism, frequent factional disputes, excessive favors for family members, the division of society into classes, disrespect for women, excessive emphasis on scholarship to the neglect of the military, emphasis on form and name rather than on practicality, excessive conservatism, and the low level of productivity.

In his critique, Yi Sang-ŭn counters Hyŏn’s assertion that Korean culture is characterized by its reverence for Chinese culture (*mohwa*). Yi claims that Korea’s love for Chinese culture is actually proof that Korea is a culturally distinct nation, one that appreciates other cultures. He argues that it is in this light that one should regard the Silla dynasty’s acceptance of Buddhism and the welcoming of Christianity and democracy in the twentieth century. Yi observes that if Koreans are to be castigated for revering Chinese culture, Westerners should be crit-

32. Pak Chong-hong, “Han’guk sasang yŏn’gue kwanhan sŏronjŏkin kusang” [Preliminary Essay on the Study of Korean Thought], *Han’guk sasang* [Korean Thought] 1 (1958 July). Reprinted in the *Pak Chong-hong chŏnjip*, vol. 4, 3-13.

33. Pak Chong-hong’s “patriotic” scholarship and his version of “Korean philosophy” took as its premise that Korean thought already existed and was merely awaiting “excavation.”

icized as “Greek-worshippers.”³⁴

On a separate occasion, commenting on continuing discussions regarding East Asian cultural identity, Yi Sang-ün explained the grounds on which he opposed the persistent denial of East Asian cultural particularity and uniqueness by those who assumed a universalist position.³⁵ First, the contributions of East Asian culture to the development of world culture should be explored in addition to those from Western culture. Second, what matters in evaluating a certain tradition of ideas should be their soundness and theoretical validity, not their national or ethnic origin. Third, the validity of an idea, old or new, cannot be judged by the times in which it was created.³⁶ The core of the argument is whether there is a culturally specific Chinese philosophy or Korean philosophy, or whether there is only one kind of philosophy, as such, since a truth could not be the truth if it is true in one culture but not in the others. These arguments brought about the opportunities for Korean intellectuals of subsequent generations to ponder the issue of the philosophical identity of Korea, if there is one, and what it is that

34. Yi Sang-ün, “Re-examining East Asian Culture,” in *Kodae Shinmun* 101 [Korea University News], 1959. Reprinted in the *Yi Sang-ün chŏnjip* [Collected works of Yi Sang-ün], vol. 2 - *chungguk ch’ŏrhak p’yŏn* [A volume on Chinese Philosophy], (Seoul: Yemun sŏwon, 1998). He was commenting on the academic discussions taking place between Yi Sang-baek and Yu Chŏng-gi in a series of articles appearing in the *Chŏn Ibo* earlier that year, 1959. Yi Sang-ün also mentioned the nature of the debate in several other articles, “Han’guke itsŏsŏui yugyoŭi kongjoeron” [On the Merits and Demerits of Confucianism in Korea], *Asea yŏn’gu* 9-4 (1966), 35 (1969), and 46 (1972) (Seoul: Korea University Asia Research Institute).
35. Yi Sang-baek elucidated his universalist stance with the following arguments. First, by imposing their narrow views on others, those who insisted on the uniqueness of East Asian culture closed off the possibility of an emerging global perspective open to the future. Second, the Japanese spend so much time talking about their own culture because they have a shallow cultural tradition. Why should Koreans follow the Japanese? Third, those who pontificate about East Asia are anti-progressive, anti-modern, and stand against the tide of world civilization. Yu Chŏng-gi’s position, on the other hand, was that an East Asian notion of truth is distinct from a Western view in that it is oriented toward the subject (towards the investigator of the truth), not toward the objective world. In Yu’s view, East Asian philosophy posits a permanent and unchanging truth that underlies the phenomenal world. Yu Chŏng-gi later elaborated his position in his article, “Tongyang ch’ŏrhakŭi hyŏndaejŏk ūiŭi” [Modern Implication of Eastern Philosophy], *Tongyang Munhwa* [Eastern Culture] 12, (Yŏngnam University Institute of Eastern Culture, 1971), 29-51.
36. See *Yi Sang-ün chŏnjip*, 58-62. For example, in the 1950s members of the *Chindan hakhoe* built on the study of *Shirhak* carried out in the 1930s to locate the inception of “modernity” in traditional Korea. The work of Han U-gŏn, Yi U-sŏng, and Ch’ŏn Kwan-u are representative of this scholarship (Chŏng Ch’ang-nyŭl, *ibid*, 309-312).

separates it from that of Chinese.

5. Philosophy Bound in National and Cultural Identity

The April Revolution of 1960 proved to be the turning point after which discourse on the nation (*minjok*) came to the fore. Following a series of heated debates, intellectuals reached a consensus around the idea that the problems of modern Korea were closely related to the concept of nation. Many scholars seriously began to reconsider earlier studies of Korean history at this time. Emphasis on the importance of history naturally caused attention to turn towards a revisiting of colonial discourse. The study of Korean philosophy was influenced and enriched by these discussions, and scholars of both Western philosophy and Confucianism began to pay serious attention to traditional Korean thought, adding it to the philosophy curricula of their universities.

After outlining a “prospectus” on the identity and scope of Korean thought in his “Preliminary Essay on the Study of Korean Thought,” Pak Chong-hong began offering a course entitled “History of Korean Philosophy” at Seoul National University. Pak also continued to publish individual scholarly works on Korean thought, publishing a compilation of this work in the 1970s as *The History of Korean Thought*, with one volume on Buddhism and a second on Confucianism. These texts are widely considered to rank among the most significant works in the field of Korean thought.³⁷ Pak’s approach is to interpret traditional Korean thought using Western philosophical language; his focus, therefore, is on delineating the “great thinkers of Korea” who can then be compared and contrasted with Western philosophers. Since Pak’s central concern is to prove that Korea indeed possesses philosophers on

37. Pak Chong-hong, *Han'guk sasangsa nongo: Pulgyo p'yŏn* [History of Korean Thought: Buddhist Thought], (Seoul: Sŏmundang, 1972); *Han'guk sasangsa nongo: Yuhak p'yŏn* [History of Korean Thought: Confucian Thought], (Seoul: Sŏmundang, 1983). Pak’s work on Buddhism continues to be regarded as among the best ever produced in the field. (Keel, “On Pak Chong-hong’s Buddhist Study,” in *Hyŏnshilgwa ch'angjo* [Reality and Creation], edited by Yŏram kinyŏm saŏphoe [Memorial Organization for Yŏram Pak Chong-hong], (Seoul: Ch'ŏnji, 1998), 243-256.

par with Plato and Kant, his central task was to define the logical structures of Korean philosophy through the “universal” terminology of Western philosophy. Pak makes use of this method in his studies on both Buddhist thinkers, especially Wonhyo, and Confucian scholars, including Yi Hwang, Chŏng Yak-yong, and Ch’oe Han-gi, among others.³⁸ He also wrote articles about Yi Chŏng-jik, Yi In-jae or Kwak Chong-sŏk, those Confucian scholars at the end of the Chosŏn dynasty who had written about Western philosophy for the first time, and marked the first of its kind as a study of modern Korean thinkers. In those articles, one can easily see how the life and scholarship of Pak, as someone who studied Western philosophy but became interested in Korean traditional thought, paralleled the predicament of those earlier Confucians who wanted to open the philosophical horizon of their own intellectual tradition. The difference was that they stood on opposite sides of an epistemic/historical divide. The last generation of Confucian scholars believed they could accept the validity of Western philosophy on their own terms. By Pak Chong-hong’s time, however, it was clear that “Korean philosophy” could only be validated using European thought.

In addition to working as a scholar, educator, and philosopher, Pak sought to apply his insight and conviction to the political sphere. In 1968, he became a member of the Presidential Council and the National Regeneration Movement Council under the Park Chung Hee regime. Following his retirement from teaching and scholarly activities in 1970, he became more engaged in politics, attaining the position of Presidential Advisor before his death in 1976. At the time of his death, he was deeply involved in drafting the National Education Constitution, a document intended to mobilize the participation of the Korean people in the National Regeneration Movement, when traditional Confucian virtues were numerated as the moral basis to build a new country.

However, during the Park Chung Hee regime, Confucianism faced a

38. See, for example, his “Philosophical Thought of Wonhyo,” *Han’guk sasang* [Korean Thought] 6 (1963), 7 (1964), and “Empiricism of Ch’oe Han-gi,” *Asea yŏn’gu* [Study on Asia] 20 (December 1965). The former was reprinted in *Han’guk sasangsa nongu: Pulgyo p’yŏn* [History of Korean Thought: Buddhist Thought], (Seoul: Sŏmundang, 1972). The latter was translated into English in *Korea Journal* (Seoul: UNESCO, 1976 Dec).

strange fate: Confucian society was denounced even as Confucian ethics were glorified.³⁹ Traditional Confucian moral injunctions such as loyalty, filial piety, and decorum were promulgated by a government propaganda campaign aimed at political consolidation to bolster the Park regime. The invention of the New-Mind movement later by the Park government exemplified the ways in which the Confucian tradition was appropriated to create a chauvinistic ideology considered necessary to justify totalitarian rule.⁴⁰ Yet, in *Our Nation's Path: Ideology of Social Reconstruction* (1962), a text attributed to Park Chung Hee, the nation's past is severely critiqued in sections entitled "Diseases of the Social Structure of the Yi Dynasty," "Evil Legacies of the Yi Dynasty," "Vassalage - Lack of Independent Spirit," "Indolence and the Desire for Unearned Income," "Lack of Pioneering Spirit," "Lack of Enterprising Spirit," "Malicious Selfishness," "Lack of Sense of Honor," and "Lack of Sound Judgment." Park holds Confucianism solely responsible for all of these evils.⁴¹ He says his critique aims to mobilize the Korean people to join his revolutionary goal of building a new nation. The outline of his vision for national renewal can be seen in the book's first chapter, "Remaking of Man, a National Task," in which, besides the cardinal virtues of Confucianism, loyalty and filial piety, the following individuals and events in the past were presented as evidence that

39. Shim Jae-ryong maintains that tradition is marked both by the power (*him*) it possesses and the burden (*chim*) it carries. Following liberation, Korean intellectuals engaged in debates over whether tradition could provide a source of power for national reconstruction or whether it was a burden, an entity to be passed on to future generations in spite of its negative impact. Shim believes that such an either/or choice is impossible; in his view, tradition possesses both of these characteristics.
40. In his New Year's message in 1979, the year following his launch of the New Mind movement, he said, "[Last year,] I established the Academy of Korean Studies in order to lay a deeper foundation for the purpose of passing on traditional culture and promoting its creative development. Also, while exerting energy towards the rehabilitation and preservation of cultural sites for the protection of the nation, I have focused on the promotion of a lofty spiritual culture by praising loyalty and filial piety and campaigning for the New Village, New Mind, and Nature Preservation movements." Pak Kün-hye, his eldest daughter, was appointed as the president of the national organization of New Mind movement.
41. Park Chung Hee [Pak Chōng-hŭi], *Our Nation's Path: Ideology of Social Reconstruction* (Seoul: Dong-A Publishing Company, 1962). The chapter entitled "Reflections on Our Nation's Past" (the chapter in which the above sections appear) presents a well-organized, detailed Korean history, one that assumes a strikingly similar tone to discussions appearing in the colonial period.

Confucianism was proffered in a positive way in a section entitled “Worthy Heritage”: the village community network in traditional Korea (*hyangyak*), Yi Sun-shin, a national hero successful in naval battles against the Japanese fleet in the 1592 Hideyoshi Invasion, the famous Confucian scholar Yi Hwang, genre literature written by the common people of the Chosŏn dynasty, and *Shirhak*. In this tension between critique and approbation, we could say that Confucianism underwent what might be called an identity crisis.

Pak Chong-hong’s efforts implicated with the ruling regime to transform the traditional thought system into a nationalistic ideology was succeeded by a group of professors of philosophy in the 1980s who produced patriotic scholarship under the rubric of “love of nation, love of country.” These scholars were responsible for the formulation of the new academic field of “National Ethics.” Departments of National Ethics, were created in universities throughout the nation and became part of the required course curricula. In the 1980s, such scholars served in the government as administrators in the Ministry of Education. These philosopher-politicians, who considered themselves modern-day Neo-Confucian scholar-officials, had little difficulty combining their academic aspirations with the goals of the ruling regimes. The political coercion extending into every nook of society during the military government was coupled with tightened national security along the lines of anti-communism, disallowing any radical social theories in the field. Marxist research in the field of traditional thought as well as Western philosophy were discredited and rooted out. In this social milieu intellectuals were easily coopted by the government, contributing significantly to this fervent effort of creating a tradition of national philosophy.

Meanwhile, the government established the Academy of Korean Studies (Han’gukchŏngshinmunhwayŏn’guwon or the Research Institute of Korean Spiritual Culture). Out of their many interests, one project pursued by the Academy involved an investigation of the philosophical implications and national spirit inherent in the national flag. As part of this endeavor, they thoroughly researched and appreciated the *Book of Changes* (along with its interpretations and commentaries by Chu-hsi). This patriotic approach towards Korean philosophy led to the development of a theory of “National Protection Thought,” as well

as to the assertion that the spiritual heritage of the Korean people was to be found in *p'unngnyu sasang*.⁴² An additional outcome of such research was a syncretic interpretation of the three traditional religions of Korea, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. The claim was made that a synthesis of these three religions in the Chosŏn dynasty would have resulted in a spiritual achievement capable of overcoming sectarian strife.⁴³

In Buddhist Studies, the ideology of National Protective Buddhism gained currency as a unique characteristic of Korean Buddhism. A conference on Wonhyo sponsored by the Ministry of National Unification was held in 1987. Papers presented at this conference asserted that Wonhyo's syncretic ideals could be used for national unification in the same way they had been for Shilla.⁴⁴

It is also interesting to note the fate of Shamanism and folk religions. Though these traditions had been valorized during the colonial period, the era of authoritarian military rule reversed this positive perspective, focusing instead on the institutionalized traditions of Confucianism and Buddhism. Shamanist practice was severely suppressed during the Park Chung Hee regime in the 60s and 70s. This antagonism continued throughout the Chun and Roh military governments, excepting certain moments such as during the National Wind festival in 1980. However, since students' anti-government movements and rallies were often characterized with the use of Shamanistic motives and symbols, this negative stance could be interpreted as being less concerned with Shamanism *per se*, as it was a part of the authoritarian regimes' undertaking of counter-insurgency and anti-communist measures. In short, the government also has power of regulating *which* aspects of tradition were allowed or not. This creation of tradition involved not only a positive portrayal of certain traditions, but also a silencing of others.

42. A religious Taoist trend traced to the Three Kingdoms period.

43. Hŏ Nam-jin, *ibid*, 72.

44. For example, in 1987, the National Unification Bureau sponsored a conference and published the accompanying volume, Kim Chi-gyŏn, ed., *Wonhyo yŏn'gu nonch'ong: kŭ ch'ŏrhakkwa in'garŭi modŏn kŏs* [Collected Papers on Wonhyo: His philosophy and life], (Seoul: National Unification Bureau, 1987).

6. Academic Discussions on the Definition and methodology of Korean philosophy

Separate from this institutional inquiry, on the individual level, another type of scholarship started to appear among certain intellectuals, a more scholarly oriented study of Confucianism that sought to problematize the methodology of previous academic studies. This self-conscious effort to problematize (*munje üüshik*) existing research led some scholars to embark upon the task of rediscovering and reevaluating Confucianism. Engaging in research on Confucian philosophy and Korean intellectual history, they worked to provide evidence on the validity and advanced state of Neo-Confucian philosophy. Their aim was to demonstrate that Neo-Confucianism could provide moral principles and be effective as a modern political ideology. One intellectual historian asserted that the literati (*sõnbi*) spirit represented the tradition of respecting austerity, honesty, and sincerity.⁴⁵ The nature of these studies indicates that these scholars were concerned with determining the unique characteristics of Korean thought as desired by the people. Given the harsh political climate, the attention of the people gravitated towards those aspects of the nation relevant to their concerns of establishing cultural identity. It is for this reason that interest in history — both pre-modern and modern — was keenly felt not only by the academic community, but also by a general population eager to learn about tradition, recover their cultural roots, and confirm their Korean identity.

Yun Sa-sun's study of Confucianism typifies research made during this period by scholars of East Asian philosophy, a discipline that emerged in the 1970s and included Buddhist and Indian philosophy and Taoist and Confucian thought. Yun's work centers on a critique of colonial discourse on the Korean Confucian tradition. In an article entitled "Problems in Historical Views on Korean Thought" (1977), Yun states that the negative assessment of Korean thought made in the colonial era was based on the Japanese historians' perception of Korean history as characterized by dependence (as seen, for example, in Korean dependence on the higher and more sophisticated thought

45. The studies by the historians Chõng Ok-cha and Han Yõng-u on the lives of Neo-Confucian scholar-officials are examples of such scholarship.

system of Chinese Neo-Confucianism). In this manner, colonialist historians such as Takahashi Tōru maintained that Korean thought was stagnant, unable to develop its own foundation for creative speculation, and incapable of broadening its horizons. Takahashi concluded that Korean Neo-Confucians were limited in their investigations because their sole interest lay in determining whether or not their scholarly understanding agreed with Chu-hsi's intentions. According to Yun, however, Takahashi was able to reach this conclusion only by covering the period beginning at the end of the Koryō dynasty and by neglecting earlier Confucian studies.⁴⁶

In opposition to Takahashi's so-called "Non-existence Theory of Korean Thought," Yun developed a theory of the "Existence of Korean Thought."⁴⁷ Yun's challenge to previous monolithic interpretations of Korean Neo-Confucianism took as its point of departure a new definition of the characteristics of *Shirhak*. Yun asserted that because *Shirhak* was meant to oppose orthodox Neo — Confucianism as well as the Wang Yang-ming School, it assumed an inherently pluralistic approach. According to Yun, T'oegye Yi Hwang's scholarship — which Takahashi argued was an example of stagnation in that it did not differ from Chinese Neo-Confucianism — should be regarded as one of the greatest examples of the contributions Korean Confucians made to Neo-Confucian scholarship in East Asia. In fact, the "Theory of Mind" developed by Korean Neo-Confucians in the seventeenth century surpassed investigations made by Chinese philosophers along those lines.⁴⁸

In the fall of 1979, the annual meeting of the Korean Philosophical Association was convened under the rubric of "East Asian Thought." A number of participants presented papers on the topic of how to "do," "study," or "analyze" East Asian thought. The suggestion was frequently made that "our study should have a different methodology than that of Western philosophy." One of the methodologies suggested

46. Yun Sa-sun, "Han'guk sasangsae itsōsō sa'gwan munje" [Problems in Historical Views on Korean Thought], *Ch'angjakkwa pip'yōng* 44 (Summer 1977).

47. Yun Sa-sun, *ibid.*, 138.

48. Yun presents the debate on "Four Ends and Seven Emotions" by T'oegye Yi Hwang and his contemporaries as a representative example of this.

as a possibility for incorporation into the modern study of Confucianism was “deliberation and contemplation” as practiced in the East Asian tradition. Another view was that the study of East Asian philosophy not only possessed a different methodology, but also had a different perspective and a different subject of concern.⁴⁹ At stake in these arguments was the issue of the identity of Korean thought.

The need to ground national identity by means of connecting it with traditional culture was clearly felt in the 1980s.⁵⁰ Along with the political changes that took place in the early 1980s came rising expectations regarding the potential worth and utility of Korean thought. We can see this in government-initiated projects — exemplified in the 1981 *kukp'ung* (“National Wind”) festival — that searched for a national identity promoted by the government. A different stimulant to Korean thought came from the local level in the form of a socio-religious search for “East Asian philosophy and wisdom.” The early 1980s witnessed the introduction of “spiritual” books by Indian religious mystics such as Rajneesh, as well as books describing indigenous mystical Taoist figures both from the past and from contemporary Korea (such as those depicted in a series of novels entitled *Tan*, a Taoist concept of crystallizing one’s inner power). Even as they addressed a personal quest for spirituality, these religious motivations were easily combined with nationalist sentiments. The marvel and miracle of Eastern wisdom had long been forgotten, and was seen by Koreans as coming from their ancestors and awaiting discovery. The desire to become wise, omniscient, and enlightened in imitation of “our” ancestors provided the impetus for the spread of pseudo-religious culture throughout Korea. The people’s movement (*minjung undong*) further contributed to this nationalistic agenda by ensuring the association of Korea’s national tradition with its cultural roots.

The *Study of Korean Philosophy*, published in three volumes in 1978 by the Korean Philosophical Association, was followed by the comple-

49. Yi Nam-yŏng, “Tongyang ch’ŏrhak kŭ yŏn’gu pangbŏp tu kaji” [Two Methodologies in Researching Eastern Philosophy], in Shim ed., *Han’guk esŏ ch’ŏrhak hanŭn chase*, 157-173.

50. See Sŏng T’ae-yong, “Tongyang ch’ŏrhak yŏn’gu pangbŏpron t’odaee taehan pansŏng” [Reflections on the Methodology of East Asian Philosophy], *Hakwon* 2 (Seoul: Hanwonsa, 1985). In this article, Sŏng explores the relations between the study of Confucianism and national tradition and culture.

tion of the three-volume *History of Korean Philosophy* in 1987. The latter was intended to be the representative text on contemporary scholarship in the field. Previous research on *Shirhak*, especially on Chŏng Yak-yong, had been carried out not as history, but as abstract thought and philosophy. We should note here that studies on Korean thought undertaken in the 1970s were inevitably theoretical and doctrinal. This was only natural, considering that the study of Korean thought was inaugurated by those trained in philosophy under scholars of Western philosophy (including comparative philosophy). When the concept of “Asian Studies” as a comprehensive discipline was introduced in the 1980s, therefore, it brought new cultural and historical perspectives to the field of philosophy.⁵¹

Although composed of a collection of papers mostly published in the 1970s, the text entitled *Views on How to do Philosophy in Modern Korea: A Korean Methodological Inquiry into the Study of Philosophy*, published in 1986, provides the best example of an attempt to situate Korean thought in the context of the 1980s. In the preface of this text, the editor, Shim Jae-ryong asks the following questions: “Why should there suddenly be such a keen interest in East Asian or Korean thought? Why do we need to know ‘the identity of Korean or East Asian philosophy? How does one do East Asian philosophy?’” Shim states that the purpose of publishing the collection of articles was to show readers the wide range of previous discussion that had taken place on the identity of Korean thought, thus making it possible for them to determine the best direction in which to move forward.

We can divide the arguments made by the various authors of the papers included in this collection into two separate categories. One category revolves around the consideration of what to include under the rubric of Korean philosophy. Arguments about this question are generally made by those who specialize in Western philosophy. These scholars claim that the term “Korean philosophy” includes not only the philosophical investigation of uniquely *Korean* thought from the past, but also any philosophical activities occurring in contemporary Korea. This assertion suggests the broader implication that when “Korean”

51. Kim Yong-ok, a Harvard trained East Asianist, played an important role in this period, offering new perspectives from which to approach the fields of Korean and East Asian thought.

scholars do analytical philosophy, it should not be called Korean analytical philosophy. It is for this reason that we encounter the exhortation to “take out ‘Korea’ and move on to broader horizons; we don’t need to be confined with the adjective ‘Korean.’”⁵²

The second category emphasizes the long tradition of philosophical thought in Korea and East Asia, making the argument that the inquiries conducted in these places were philosophical. In other words, East Asia had philosophical traditions “too.” This view suggests that Korean traditional philosophy itself, or the study of it, should be regarded as “Korean philosophy.”

Most of the papers falling into the second category begin their arguments with a critique of papers belonging to the first category. At the same time, attempts were made to negotiate differences and find common ground. It is important to note that there were certain points common to many of the positions. For example, some scholars who mostly majored in Western philosophy argued that the definition of Korean philosophy can not simply be limited to an object of study. Korean philosophy was not relegated to the study of the philosophical tradition of the past. Regardless of the fields of study in which they conducted research, they claimed that they were all participating in the field of Korean philosophy. In other words, according to this seemingly radical definition of Korean philosophy, regardless of whether they studied traditional systems of thought such as Confucianism or Buddhism or did research on Wittgenstein or Hegel, they shared the opinion that they were all participants in the formation and future development of a Korean philosophical tradition. Nonetheless, in spite of their diverse positions and differences, they came to a consensus that the central dilemma to be confronted was how to interpret tradition. Should tradition be something to observe or to revere? Is tradition an ongoing process?

In light of the above discussion, it was of considerable interest to

52. Shim Jae-ryong’s own work simultaneously inheres the two contrasting attitudes of scholars in East Asian studies — “Pedagogue-ish” and “Missionary-ish.” The former views tradition as a treasure; the latter prefers to import learning from the West. Shim Jae-ryong, “Tongyang ch’ŏrhakül hanön tu chase” [Two stances in Philosophizing Eastern Philosophy], in Shim ed., *Han’gukesŏ ch’ŏrhak hanün chase*, 243. Originally this article appeared in *Hakwon* 1 (Seoul: Hakwonsa, Summer 1985).

see that the spring 1999 issue of the *Korea Journal* focused on the theme of “Defining Korean Philosophy in the Twentieth Century.” The papers published in this issue no longer bother to argue over whether Confucianism or Buddhism should be included under the rubric of Korean philosophy, or whether the study of ancient Greek philosophy should be contained in a volume on Korean philosophy. This represents a significant departure from debates in the 1970s on the identity of Korean philosophy. Both “Korean” and “philosophy” have been consensually defined in the broadest possible senses of each word. What this means is that “Korean” had assumed a more important role than “philosophy,” establishing finally the primacy of national identity over all other considerations. As a result of these often heated debates as to whether it could be regarded as philosophy, in comparison to Western philosophy, the ancient thought system that had been packaged and classified as history, literature, religion, or culture, had eventually found a privileged place in academia as philosophy.

The discourse on Korean thought established by Pak Chong-hong in the early 1950s confined itself to a highly speculative system of thought that has been challenged in contemporary Korea and broadened into a more inclusive field. The transformation of the field of Korean thought has been characterized by passionate arguments regarding Korean identity and the glorification the past. In the 1970s and 1980s, this transformation was facilitated by political campaigns to boost national identity. Predictably, attempts were made to validate and redefine Korean thought from within the field of Korean philosophy itself. But Western conceptions of philosophy, which constituted the field of Korean philosophy in the first place, continue to define the field of Korean thought into the twenty-first century.

Eunsu Cho is assistant professor in the department of Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She received her M.A. in philosophy from Seoul National University and Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. Her research interest includes Korean Buddhism, Korean thought and intellectual history, and Indian Abhidharma Buddhist philosophy. Her most recent article, "Wonch'ŭk's Place in the East Asian Buddhist Tradition," will be appearing in *Counter-currents of Influence: Korea's Place in the East Asian Buddhist Tradition*, edited by Robert E. Buswell. She is currently completing her book manuscript, tentatively titled "Creating a Buddhist Tradition: Wonhyo and the Making of a Korean Buddhist Identity."

