

Special Feature

Nomadism and the Discovery of the Nation: The Case of Yun Chiho

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East Asia, during its Turbulent Period, and the Fate of Joseon

As the debate over modernization in Asia continues, the discussion reveals the historical, cultural and geographical complexity of Korea. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the *Seosedongjeomgi*, Korea outwardly faced political pressure from China and Japan while inwardly undergoing civil unrest. With the spark of the industrial revolution, Western nations competed with one another to expand their colonial territories, including in India and China. Meanwhile, Korea lacked the maturity that would enable her to join the changing system of the world. Japan consecutively won wars against China in 1894 and Russia in 1904, two countries which had been threatening Korean independence.

In 1905, officials of Japan and Korea signed the Eulsa Treaty (also known as the Protectorate Treaty) that led to the 1907 dissolution of the Korean army and changes to the foreign affairs ministry in 1909. In 1910, Japan annexed Korea, taking away the Korean identity. The historical record is shameful to Koreans and many have studied the reasons for such failure.

In fact, the Eulsa Treaty evoked much anger among Koreans. The people repeatedly sought repudiation of the treaty. Jang Jiyeon, a journalist, wrote a column in the newspaper Hwangseong titled *shiehyabangsungdaegok*, meaning “I wail on this day.” Min Younghwan killed himself after writing a will expressing hope for Korea’s independence as well as imploring against Japan’s wrongdoing to the world’s ministers. Shops closed down as their owners denounced the treaty. Students also protested against the treaty. An independence fighter named An Chunggeun fired three bullets at Ito Hirobumi, known as the ringleader of the Japanese imperial invasion. These events, although they told the world of Joseon’s spirit of resistance, nonetheless lacked leadership. These movements therefore subsided without any practical results.

A larger-scale movement started on March 1, 1919 in which more than two million participated and more than 7,500 were killed. As a result, Korea established its government-in-exile. Also, voluntary fighters emerged from different parts of the country and resistance movements continued in countries such as China and Hawaii where Japan lacked authority. These independence movements have been classified into three: (1) a self-strengthening movement in order to enliven the national spirit; (2) resistance

through foreign policy, asking for help from other countries such as Russia and the United States; and (3) the efforts, including military action, by the Korean government-in-exile in Shanghai as well as from Manju in 1931.

The so-called National Character Revision movement (*Minjokseong gaejo undong*) also emerged from these movements. However, scholars have criticized it as much too lenient towards Japanese rule in Korea. A literary critic Im Heonyeong wrote that these attempts were only producing useless speeches rather than activating the independence movements. Lee Kwangsu, known as the spokesperson for the National Character Revision movement, had been using a Japanese name two years before the government demanded that all Koreans change their names as part of their nationalistic propaganda. Currently, Korean historians and critics stigmatize him as a traitor (Banminjok yeonguso 1993:24-33).

Yun Chiho also received these criticisms. According to scholars such as Suh Joongseok and Kim Dohoon, Yun Chiho was someone who harbored a pessimistic view of the Korean nation, and who compromised his original reforming ideals and substituted pro-Japan ones. They continued to write that, “Although he once had been a good citizen, he turned into Ito Chikau, a faithful member of the Japanese empire by the moment of his death” (Garam gihoek 1995:174). This kind of criticism toward a person tends to turn into a criticism against the whole National Character Revision movement (Garam gihoek 1995:160). Personally, I want to question whether or not such stigmatization is fair against the National Character Revision movement. Is the motive of this movement so obvious? Did it turn a man such as Yun into a traitor? Are not these men mere individuals rather than components of the National Character Revision movement? These questions seem more valid when one realizes that Yun had not been so “Japan-friendly” throughout his personal life. What sort of conscience did he have, that he went through a 180-degree change of morality? I will make observations on the course of his life in order to give an answer to this problem.¹

1. Yun Chiho started his life having Confucian values, and following East Asian traditions. Later he became a Christian, which religion came via the West. His life requires an examination from various points of view. If there was anything consistent in his life, it was his relationship with the word “Joseon.” Throughout his life, he had expressed feelings for Joseon such as passion, hopelessness and nostalgia. What kind of “Joseon” did he discover, and how do these

Yun Chiho and his Nomadic² Life

Yun was an intellectual who studied abroad in China, Japan and the United States during the years between 1880 and 1890. Although his father was an elite military man, he studied Chinese literature since he was eleven years old. For two years afterwards he studied with Eo Yunjung. In 1881, the well-known scholar brought Yun to study abroad in Japan. While studying at the Taojinxia established by Japanese liberal philosopher Nakamura Masanao, he found himself among modern ideas and artifacts. Towards the end of 1882 he met Kim Ok Kyun who came to Japan with Korean ambassador Park Younghyo. Yun realized the need to learn English when he met Kim. He started learning English from a Dutch secretary at the consulate. After four months, he went back to Korea as the translator for the first American envoy and minister to Korea, Lucius Foote.

Despite his achievements, Yun went into exile after the Gapshin political uprising. The leaders of the uprising branded him as a revolutionist along with Kim Ok Kyun. In Shanghai, however, he entered the Mid-West Academy (*Joongseo seowon*) affiliated with the Southern Methodist Church in the United States. Stahl, an American consul general, helped Yun get into the academy. On April 3, 1887 one of his professors, Bonnel, who was also a pastor, baptized Yun. As a result, he became the first Protestant Methodist of Joseon. In 1888, he finally went to study abroad in the United States, which he had long dreamed of doing. He first studied theology at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee, then went on to Emory College in 1891 to pursue his studies further in the humanities.

In October 1893, after his five-year stay in the States, he worked as an English teacher at the Mid-West Academy in Shanghai for two years. In February of 1895, he was appointed to *Euijeongbu Chamui* and *Hakbu*

discoveries relate to the society today?

2. "A French philosopher Gilles Deleuze uses the word *nomad* in his book *Difference and Repetition* (1968). He describes the Nomadic world as where time travels around. The word is also used as a title of the book by Lee Jinkyung. She gave lectures on *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980). Not only does it describe a philosophical idea, it describes the cultural and psychological phenomenon of the contemporary society." Quoted from the *Doosan Encyclopedia*. In this paper, I will use the word Nomadism to describe Yun Chiho's experiences of moving from place-to-place (Japan, China and America), from an idea to another, during his life.

Hyuppan. At the age of thirty-one, he began his political career. During his political career, his social involvement did not stop. In 1898 he was elected as the chair of the Independence Association and in October of the same year to the chair of the *Kwanmin Gongdonghoe*. His influence grew as did the number of followers. After the Eulsa Treaty he resigned his post at the Association of Foreign Affairs, and concentrated on activities at the *Hwangseong* Christian youth gathering. In 1908 he assumed his duties as the headmaster of *Daesung* school, which was established by Ahn Changho. When Japan annexed Korea, his father Yoon Woongreol, was graced with the title of Baron. After his father's death, he inherited the title of Baron, but in 1912, when he was arrested in relation to his involvement in "the 105-men incident" his privileges were revoked. When the March 1st movement broke out, Yun maintained a certain amount of distance from the independence fighters of Korea. He died in 1945, the year of Korean independence.

Observing Yun Chiho's life is meaningful because it helps us to reflect on the changes that went on in East Asia. Yun had a unique career, being born in Joseon and then studying abroad in Japan, China and even in the United States. He was one of the intellectuals who expressed a distinctive personal opinion on the loss of the Korean empire and the process of its recovery. Through studying his life, we connect to a theme of the "East Asian traditions and their modernity." His ideological pilgrimage included his becoming a traditional civil servant based on the Confucian education of his youth, then following his father's advice and experiencing Japan's passion for "modernization" as he studied abroad among intellectuals. Afterwards he went on a forced visit to China which, at that time, was surrounded by the Great Powers. This finally led him to the United States. There, he reevaluated his traditional Confucian view and entered the world of Christianity, making himself a model of the nomadic intellectual.

Viewing Yun as a Traditional Confucian Scholar

Park Nohja and Huh Dong Yeon compare Yun with the Chinese revolutionary Ryangchichao. They are deemed similar because they both realized that the Confucian discourse did not allow a distinction between the public and

private sphere for an individual. These figures were both intellectuals who worked to revolutionize their home countries.³ Especially of Yun, they think that he had tendencies toward getting rid of Confucianism as a whole. Yun had criticized Confucianism for its pursuit of self-interest and for its coming close to totalitarianism (Huh and Park 2003:107-108). Yet knowing that Yun had studied from the Confucian text since an early age, it is not fair to situate him opposite from his own traditions. The fact that he actively accepted Christian doctrines should not have deterred him from still being a man with a Confucian worldview. At a basic level, one can view Yun as someone who tried to maintain the status of a loyal servant (of the king).

When he returned home in 1895, he served as a *hakbu heoppan*, a civil servant, as well as one of the leaders of the independence club (*Dongnip hyphoe*) from 1897. He became the president of the club starting in August of 1898. As its president his plans were to acknowledge the king's authority and to bring enlightenment to the public as the king's government official. Such plans required a longer time for rebuilding of the country compared to Lee Seung Man's radical plans of revolution and independence. Lee argued that even the ruler of a country should be subject to the law, which was a threatening thought to the government (Lee 1993:75-79). Lee had barely escaped a sentence of life imprisonment in 1904 with the help of Min Younghwan.

Yun also adhered to the Confucian emphasis on being a loyal offspring to one's forefathers. When he described his father in his journal, it seeped with genuine emotion.⁴ He described his father as having had an unfortunate life, including his going on the series of exiles. His father, Yun Woongreol, who was one of the highest military officials of Joseon, fled to Japan in relation to the *Imoh* military turmoil in 1882. From that time on, the elder Yun was involved in a various political ups and downs throughout the rest of his life, only to die in 1911.

In relation to Yun's use of the term *Inui* (generosity and right) to

3. The writers introduce theories of the East Asian revolutionaries such as the "Eastern Way at the Western Plate." They wrote that Ryangchichao of the Cheong (China) and Yun Chiho from Joseon made efforts to abolish the Eastern way.

4. When Yun looked back on the life of his uncle who died in November 1939, he writes that "he was the most fortunate man in Joseon...But it was different for me and my father.

indicate the social advancement of Western civilization, he still used and stayed within the concept of the traditional Confusion moral and philosophical value system (Yang 1994:28). By using the concept of *Inui* he lauded the achievement of Western governments in tending to guarantee the rights of their people more firmly.

Viewing Yun as a Christian and a Modernist

Yun became a Christian while he was in Shanghai. Since then, he came to represent Joseon's Methodist community. In 1910, he attended international Christian conferences at which he met other Christians from around the world. In 1930, he led the process of combining the North and South Methodist church. In addition, he became the headmaster of *Songdo* Academy which had been founded by the American Methodist church. In the 1940s, he was appointed as the president of Yeonhui University. He also worked for the YMCA as its director, president, and the chairman of the union.

Following from his close relationships with American Christian institutions, Yun showed his fondness towards America. "Russia prides itself on its physical strength yet lacks intelligence. Germany is also strong but lacks generosity. The U.S.A. says that it possesses strength, intellect and love. In fact, America will grow into a wise, kind and great country" (Yun 2001:123). These sentiments reappeared in the moments that he described the Christianity in the U.S. "I do not agree with Yoshimura's opinion in the Biblical Research Magazine's column. He writes that 'the wealthy America replaces money with a genuine Gospel message.' Yet who else but America would preach the Gospel without any money? America had been earning her wealth by just means. As far as I know, the money was spent more generously and wisely than it had been in any other countries. Who else but America would have provided the hospitals and schools of Joseon?" (Yun 2001:127). Yun's partiality towards the United States included his critical view of the Asian empires such as China and India.⁵ He despised

5. "The Chinese representatives at Paris expressed their resentments with how the Sandong

China's corrupt government officials and military dictators. Perhaps Yun was disappointed that China lost its war against Japan and grew vulnerable to plunder by the West. Yun also criticized India for not being able to form a single government due to differences in language, politics and religion. Yun directed his severest criticisms towards India's religion.⁶

Yet Yun's Christian worldview did not leave the discussion at comparing nations and their politics.⁷ He saw that men are originally sinful, that "history is only a record of men and nations injuring one another and doing injustice."⁸ From Yun's point of view, only the fittest have survived in history, and men have been the most boorish creatures of all; despite what others argue, "religion" has merely become a tool through which men murder one another. This is the same with any "science" or "-isms". Through these things, men have turned the world into a "hell" (Yun 2001:319-20). Yun had thus been a Christian, but spoke out against numerous wrongs committed in the name of religion.

He harbored the very negative view of human nature that does not stop at characterizing a nation. Such a view of human understanding did

problems were handled. They refused to sign the peace treaty. Are the Chinese really angry at the ways other countries, especially Japan treat them? If that is true, why didn't they establish a centralized government more quickly? Why are they letting corrupt politicians and selfish military dictators divide up their lands to rule? As long as the Chinese lack the wise, strong and patriotic skills to govern their country, it is not possible to receive the appropriate treatment from the other countries. Who would respect a friend acting beggarly, without any self esteem? I do not believe that the Chinese are truly angry" (Yun 2001:124).

6. "Not long ago, an Indian poet Tagore sent a letter to the Indian governor in order to protest the ways the English maltreated the people of Punjab. A country with three million people cannot form a strong and centralized government due to language, politics and religion—Religion is the worst of all. They only strut with their philosophy. They whine because of what a small number of foreigners did to them. Most Indians enjoy better lives and economic security under the English rule, which is better than that of the corrupt Indian rulers. They need to first learn how to unite. Whining, or writing a good poem are all worthless" (Yun 2001:128).
7. The Christian teachings include the idea of the Original Sin and the Total Depravity of men, following the fall of the first human who was created in God's image.
8. "While Cromwell was ruling he argued that the Presbyterians should kill all the native Irish people as they killed all the Catholics. When I went to Alabama in 1910, the Methodist minister Jenkins said that all black people should be killed in due time. This was very shocking for me. I heard how the Japanese inadvertently said that their hopes and wishes of one day finding the Joseon people only in the corners of Siberia. The most resentful of human nature is committing atrocities in the name of patriotism, freedom, royalty and religion" (Yun 2001:125).

not originate from the political tragedy of Korea. He expressed this reality by mourning the endless wars, destruction, and massacres. A negative view of the whole of human history and a deep mistrust in human nature brought Yun closer to the problem of Joseon. There is a spectrum that begins first with mistrusting men, then a group, and then mistrusting Joseon as a nation. Perhaps this can provide one of many explanations as to why Yun defected to a “Japan-friendly” position.

A Confucianist Christian and his Sense of National Identity

Generally, writings that deem Yun to be one of the National Revisionists argue that the Joseon Yun had found was full of pessimistic views (Banminjokyeonguso 1993:159). Such criticisms of the “Japan-friendly” Yun Chiho brand Yun as someone who, from early on, failed in keeping the national identity, someone who thought fighting for independence was worthless (Yun 2001:160-61). The critics usually quote the interview from *Maeil shinbo*,⁹ taken right after he came out of jail and was stripped of his title. They also quote the stories told at the *Kyungsung ilbo*,¹⁰ after the March 1st movement began in 1919. They take these sources out of context as well as use them out of chronological order. These writings therefore make it difficult for the readers to at least doubt that Yun had been an active component of the Japanese scheme (Yun 2001:161). However, a few of these episodes do not encompass the scope of what “Nation” meant for Yun. He had actually been a loyal citizen who passionately dreamt of a self-reliant nation. With more of an objective point of view, Kim Sangtae writes that Yun had an accurate perception of Japan’s ruling system and Joseon’s reality. Yun had judged that Japan had forcefully annexed Joseon and demanded

9. “We, the people of Joseon should continue to trust Japan and make efforts until we stop seeing them as others...From now on I plan to work for the greater happiness and assimilation along with the Japanese authorities” (*Maeil shinbo* 1915).

10. “The weak should continue to obey the strong and encourage their relationship. This will form a structural basis for peace and harmony. If the weak continue to resist the strong, it causes anger which in turn causes increasing malice. In this way, it is not helpful that Joseon ceaselessly attempts the disquieting rebellions against Japan (*Kyungsung ilbo* 1919).

that the people of Joseon assimilate with them. Socially and economically, Yun knew how Japan was discriminating against and exploiting the Korean people. Japan was looting Korea's lands as well as inputting systems of national discrimination in all areas of their policy making process. Yun even wrote in his journal that "Joseon is filled not with the Emperor's grace, but with his malice" (Kim 1994). Kim observes fairly that Yun seemed to show strong national pride when he wrote the resentful words against the emperor and his malice.

Although he seemed to have been too much of a pacifist around the time of the March 1st movement, these actions stemmed from his knowledge and belief in the ways international politics worked at the time. Right before the March 1st movement had launched, he refused his colleagues when they requested that he hold diplomatic meetings with Europe and the Americas. After the First World War, Yun felt that the relations between the countries were only power struggles in which each country strives for their own benefit. A plea for Korea's independence would not have been heard at such moments in which only the fittest would survive (Yun 2001:35).

Yun did not think that countries such as the United States would sympathize with Joseon's plight and protect her cause for independence. As far as Yun had believed, "Independence" was not something others give out, but something that one can achieve only by having the right amount of strength and skills. Yun had been a central figure for the revolutionary and self-strengthening movements in nineteenth century Korea. In the beginning of 1895 he returned from foreign exile after ten years and became a government official. Starting from late 1897 he led the Independence Association with Lee Sang Jae and Seo Jae pil. In August 1898 he became the president and led crucial events such as the *Manmin Gongdonghoe*. Yet as the imperial court called for the group to break up, Yun had to give up his hopes for the Independence Association. For Yun, the Eulsa Treaty of 1905 actually meant that the nation's authority had been taken away. Beginning from 1910 Yun took responsibility for this atrocity and passionately began the work of patriotism and nationalism.

So how did Yun's patriotic motivation turn around so that he became a subservient member of Japan's empire? Are these movements or the "National Character Revision" bound to conceive Japan-friendly thoughts?

Logically speaking, how could efforts on behalf of one's nation turn into efforts against the nation? In order to find answers to these questions, we need to try to read Yun Chiho more carefully. Yun's "National Character Revision" is closely related to the Eulsa Treaty following the breakup of the Independence Association. In contrast to what most scholars argue, Yun can be seen as far from being someone who had an identity crisis (in the form of wishing to be a man rather than an "alien").¹¹ China, Korea's "surrogate fatherland," had lost the war against Japan. This surely disillusioned Yun. Soon after in 1904, one of the Great Powers, Russia, had lost the war. After such events, Yun began to analyze the fates of some countries winning, and others bitterly losing.

As a young man of thirty-five years of age, he thought through the ways in which he could change the fate of his nation. This led him to say that "Joseon should abandon her political insistence on independence and make efforts to improve the quality of life within the boundaries of the law."¹² From his point of view, the independence movements were what the ignorant public had set up in order to compensate for their lack of knowledge in independence and democracy (Yun 2001:99). After 1938, he became an active participant in Japan's imperial policies such as the "Joseon Union for the Citizen Ethos Mobilization." He also became the president of the Military Support Group on Japan's behalf as well as of the "Union for Joseon's Return." Yun had judged Japan as possessing the physical strength and skills that one needs for survival. What Yun hoped was for Joseon to "not become Japan's Ireland, but Scotland."¹³ Yun did not want Joseon to

11. Huh and Park satirically describe Yun as an alien-like creature yelling "I want to be a human being," because of his inability to be part of either America, China or Joseon where the devilish government was (Huh and Park 2003:40-42).

12. Yun left many notes expressing his regrets about the falling status of Joseon on the international scene. He also expresses his opinion that the fall has to do with internal problems rather than coming from the relationships with other countries around Joseon. He writes, "Park Seungbin dropped by yesterday morning. He informed me that he will go to Japan to meet their political leaders along with Lee Gichan and others. He said that the Joseon people want a self-ruling government, that assimilation is impossible. He also said that many people including himself are not afraid of going to jail. But I doubt that the Japanese will allow this, and whether the people of Joseon are capable of maintaining this self-governance" (Yun 2001:125).

13. Yun pointedly writes, "It is very unnecessary and stupid to tell Joseon to completely change

lose either its identity or its national spirit. What he asked for, realistically, was for fellow Koreans to maintain their identity and become part of a multiethnic empire.

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their ways into the Japanese ways. Diversity is what gives flavor to life. If Japan wants to become an empire, it has to embrace the multiethnic groups. It is impossible to force everything to become the same” (Yun 2001:496).

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Abstract

The so-called National Character Revision movement (*Minjokseong gaejoundong*) has been criticized by the majority scholars for its character being much too lenient towards Japanese rule in Korea. The movement has been rendered as an attempt which only produced useless speeches rather than activating the independence movements against Japanese imperial rule.

While the most well-known figure of the movement was Choonwon Lee, Kwangsoo, Yun Chiho also received these criticisms. Scholars such as Suh Joongseok and Kim Dohoon assail Yun saying that, “Although he once had been a good citizen, he turned into Ito Chikau, a faithful member of the Japanese empire by the moment of his death.”

With such a harsh evaluation in mind, the writer raises the question whether or not such stigmatization is fair against the National Character Revision movement. Is the motive of this movement so obvious, that it provides more than enough reason for turning a man such as Yun into a traitor? Are not these men mere individuals rather than components of the National Character Revision movement? These questions seem more valid when one realizes that Yun had not been so “Japan-friendly” throughout his life. The writer analyzes the course of Yun’s life utilizing the concept of “Nomadism” in order to provide an answer to this problem.

Keywords: National Character Revision movement, Nomadism, tradition, Japan-friendly, nationalism