The Civilizing Process in the West and Korea: Norbert Elias’ Theory and Confucianism

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1. Civilization and Barbarity

Due to the controversy over the distortion of middle school and high school history textbooks by the Japanese History Textbook Reform Society and other similar organizations, and to the Japanese Prime Minister Junichirō Koizumi’s official visit to the Yasukuni Shrine, the national shrine for the war dead, relations between South Korea and the Land of the Rising Sun are deteriorating as never before even though the two nations are co-hosting 2002FIFA World Cup. In the case of South Korea, protest rallies and demonstrations continue to be held. Anyone with a bit of interest in the history of the two nations, however, will realize that the uncomfortable relations between Korea and Japan fundamentally stem from the fact that for nearly 36 years in the early 20th century, the former was the latter’s colony.

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Gwangju, the location of the university at which I teach, has been widely known as the city of peace and human rights ever since the Gwangju Democratization Movement, which took place there in May 1980 against the military dictator regime that ruled South Korea then. But the city is famous also for the students’ independence movement that arose in 1929 against Japanese rule over Korea. Indeed, the Gwangju Students’ Independence Movement, which subsequently spread to some 194 schools and saw the participation of more than 54,000 students nationwide over the next year, was one of the three major independence movements to take place in Korea during the colonial era.

Initially, the anti-colonial movement was sparked off by a skirmish between local Korean and Japanese middle school students who commuted by train. Among the incidents which ignited the student movement was one where a Japanese middle schooler was beaten by his Korean peers for having said, after seeing a group of Koreans roast a dog outside the train, “Koreans are barbaric.” In other words, Japanese students’ ethnic contempt for their Korean colleagues was the major cause among the numerous reasons for the movement.

With the World Cup just around the corner, certain animal rights organizations and the media in both the West and Korea have continued an active debate regarding the human consumption of dogmeat. Just as that Japanese middle schooler did 70 years ago,

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2 Indeed, this is a re-run of an international “fiasco” that arose before the Olympic
Western journalists have criticized the Korean custom of eating
dogmeat as "barbaric," even to claim, quite falsely, that people have
dogmeat three meals a day and pack it in students’ lunch boxes in
South Korea.3 Unable to withstand pressure from animal rights
groups, even the FIFA has demanded that Seoul government take
“satisfactory measures” regarding the abusive treatment and

correction actions" such as ordering the numerous, usually family-run, dogmeat
eaters to go, in effect, into “hiding” and having them change the name of the most
popular dogmeat dish from the more obvious (?) “restorative stew” to the more vague
“all-seasons stew.” Needless to say, however, such measures eventually proved
ineffective and the custom of eating dogs continues. The main problem lies in the as
yet illegal status of dogmeat as food in South Korea and the consequently illegal, often
brutal, slaughter and unhygienic supply of dogmeat. What is noteworthy about
Koreans’ attitude toward the controversy this time is that both the government and the
people are quite “proud” of eating dogmeat, i.e., foreigners should not interfere
because dogmeat consumption is a unique Korean custom (The Chosun Ilbo 4 Jan 2002,
The Dong-A Ilbo 8 Jan 2002)

3 In fact, Koreans are not the only people to have enjoyed dogmeat traditionally. In
different periods, if not even today, at least a large number of Chinese and Vietnamese
also loved this delicacy without any condemnation from their respective cultures.
Vietnam has been actively supportive of Koreans in the current debate over dogmeat
consumption. I must also mention that the Western concept of household pets was
virtually non-existent in traditional East Asia except, perhaps, for the ruling class. Even
then, dogs and, to a lesser degree, cats were raised outside the house as a rule, due in
part to the Korean (as well as Japanese) custom of removing shoes indoors. Even now,
among more traditional-minded Koreans (and, undoubtedly, other dog-eating East
Asians), dogs are seen primarily as watch guards and, in times of festivity or dire
need, as sources of protein. Consequently, cases of some Westerners’ “extreme”
devotion to their pet dogs (and cats) such as the bequest of inheritance continue to
remain something of a puzzle—if not a source of ridicule—to Koreans even in this age
of globalization.
consumption of dogs.4

However, dogmeat has been eaten in Korea since time immemorial, it is one of the traditional dishes of the country. Of course, dogmeat aficionados are decreasing in number in South Korea nowadays. Nevertheless, not a few people still continue to eat dogmeat during the hot, humid summer days in order to replenish their energy and stamina.5 In fact, North Koreans are even greater lovers of dogmeat than are their southern brothers. While dogmeat dishes only amount to several different kinds in South Korea, they run to over twenty varieties in North Korea.6 The custom of eating dogmeat may, then, serve as one effective link between the two Koreas, which, after all, are the only divided nation in the world today, in reconfirming their ethnic and cultural identity.

To animal lovers in the West, Koreans will probably seem like a

4 The Dong-A Ilbo 7 Nov 2001.

5 Irrespective of medical validity, dogmeat has been regarded in Korea as food conducive to virility, as the name of the most representative dish implies. Perhaps not strangely, men are more openly fond of the dish than are women. In addition, new mothers and those recuperating from certain illnesses are often advised to eat dogs as a means of restoring their energy. The custom of eating particular food in summer holds true for Japan as well, although, there, the targets are eels instead of dogs.

6 Kang-hyeon Chu, Gaegoga-woo Munhwada Jegyukwua [Dogmeat and Cultural Imperialism] (Seoul Jung-ang M & B, 2002) 271-279. Unlike the more Westernized and hence rather apologetic South Koreans, North Koreans seem to have no qualms whatsoever about the custom of eating dogmeat (which, perhaps not incidentally, is also called “sweet meat”). Indeed, some of the few Westerners who were lucky enough to travel in North Korea were offered, quite nonchalantly and innocently, dogmeat dishes by state guides at “tourist” restaurants. No doubt, the relative scarcity of food has contributed to this general fondness for dogmeat in North Korea—the very reason that brought about the same custom in traditional Korea in the first place.
"barbaric" people. However, the custom of eating dogmeat came into being among Koreans not because they were especially "barbaric" but because of their historical and social circumstances. In medieval Korea, the only way impoverished peasants could obtain animal nutrients was to eat dogs. This was because the slaughter of oxen, precious "work hands" in a rice-growing society, was prohibited. Pigs and chickens, on the other hand, were scarce. Indeed, a traditional Korean proverb goes, "When a man visits his wife's family, his mother-in-law will serve him chicken."^8

It was precisely because of his analysis of the civilizing process in Western Europe in terms of historicism and cultural relativism that I have come to take an interest in Norbert Elias (1897-1990), in addition to the fact that manners and rituals, the main topics of his works, are closely related to the East Asian concept of "propriety" (禮; Chinese lǐ; Korean ye; Japanese rei; also translated as "rites" or

7 While extremely humid and hot, summer in Korea is too short to make the country ideal for rice farming. Moreover, Korean winter, which sets in relatively quickly, is extremely dry and cold due to winds from Siberia. As a result, rice farming has been far more backbreaking than in the case of Southeast and South Asia, where two harvests are possible in one year. The problem is further complicated by the fact that much of the peninsula is mountainous, indeed, except for a small pocket of flatland in the southwest—Korea's "rice bowl"—rice growing is difficult. Hence northern Koreans, not unlike the northern Chinese, have traditionally been greater consumers of noodles and dumplings than their primarily rice-eating southern brothers.

8 Thanks to economic development and their increasingly Westernized diet, modern South Koreans, of course, no longer attach such culinary value to chicken—or any other meat, for that matter. Nonetheless, meat of any kind still is not a daily staple regardless of one's economic status. This proverb also bespeaks the male-dominated social structure of traditional—and modern—Korea. While a married woman is basically subordinate to her husband's extended family, the married man continues to be a "guest" to his wife's kinsmen, someone to be petted and appeased.
"rituals"), my primary field of research. By virtue of such relativism, his research would seem to contribute considerably to the overcoming of the West's prejudice against the East and imperialist nations' bias against their colonies—in other words, orientalism.9

2. Elias' Theory of Civilization

Elias' theory of civilization is elucidated in the Civilizing Process (volumes I and II), his major work. This book was published in Basel, Switzerland, in 1939 during the author's days as an exile in Great Britain. Introduced to and studied to a certain extent only by Dutch scholars, however, this work failed to attract the notice of American and other European scholars for some time. Among other reasons, such inattention was caused primarily by the standpoint and research methods adopted by Elias, who at the time was outside the mainstream of modern sociology. Indeed, it was only in the 1970's that he was finally accepted by the mainstream academia once again. In 1975, the German Sociological Association conferred honorary membership on him. In 1977, Frankfurt-am-Main awarded him the Adorno Prize.10

The first volume of the Civilizing Process consists of three parts, which deal, respectively, with: the social genesis of the concepts

9 Regarding orientalism, see Edward W. Said, trans by Hong-gyu Pak, Orientalyewn [Orientalism] (Seoul: Kyobo Mun-go, 1991)

“civilization” and “culture”; “civilization” as a specific transformation of human behavior, and the origins and development of Western civilization. In Part 1, Elias points out that the concept of “civilization” has disparate meanings in France and Germany and goes on to explore the social origins of the conflict between the concepts “civilization” (Zivilisation) and “culture” (Kultur) in Germany and the origins of the concept of “civilization” (civilisation) in France. In the second part, the author meticulously examines the civilizing process in the West from the 12th to the 19th century. With conduct books and etiquette manuals as main texts, he here focuses on daily conduct and rituals including table manners and ways of responding to bodily needs such as blowing one’s nose and spitting. In Part 3, Elias elucidates the sociogenetic origins of the civilizing process in relation to the disintegration of feudalism and the emergence of the modern state and, in conclusion, synthesizes his theory as a “blueprint” for a theory of civilization.

As he states in the preface, Elias established his unique theory of the civilizing process in this work through a careful study of the civilizing process in the West in relation to changes in social structures, psychological attitudes, and behavioral structures. In other words, the Civilizing Process was an attempt at a deft theoretical synthesis of sociology, psychology, and historiography—and, to a certain extent, a successful one. His theory of the civilizing process therefore is noteworthy in several aspects.

The first notable characteristic of the theory lies in the author’s neutral, objective use of the term “civilization.” In his preface to the Civilizing Process, Elias states that, in the process of research, he steered clear of prejudices such as the view that civilized behavior is
the most advanced mode of behavior available and possible to all men or that, as the worst mode of life, civilization is doomed to destruction. Throughout the main body of the book, he likewise refuses to see medieval modes of behavior as "the beginning," "the lowest stage," "barbaric," or "primitive" on the basis of a simplistic opposition between the concepts "civilization" and "barbarity." Because the medieval era had standards that are different from those of the modern era, he goes on, whether they are "better" or "worse" are besides the point.

The second characteristic of Elias' theory is his understanding of "civilization" as an on-going process, which of course is obvious from the title of his work in the first place. Moreover, he defined "civilization" as a "specific transformation of human behavior" and sought to shed light on the process through which daily conduct changed over a long period. The "civilization curve" best represents this aspect of the book. After examining the civilizing process through a survey of changes in the daily conduct of the secular upper class in the West, Elias drew a civilization curve for each mode of behavior and stressed the similarity among these curves. We can then say that the civilization curve is a concrete and formal embodiment of the author's theory of the civilizing process.

The third notable aspect of Elias' theory lies in his view of "civilization" not as a static structure but as a dynamic relationship. One of the most important concepts in his theory is that of "figuration," which signifies the concrete forms of interpersonal relationships that people form through their behavior. In other words, this concept expresses, at the same time, individuals in a society and the society that they compose. Figuration therefore comprehends
anything from the simplest relationship between two individuals to the family, school, society, and state. As the concept is expanded to include larger units, interdependence among the respective members increases Elias' civilizing process then is none but the process through which such figuration developed and changed.  

The fourth characteristic of the author's theory is his combined use of both microscopic and macroscopic viewpoints in approaching "civilization." The basic premise of Elias' theory of the civilizing process is that changes in social structures bring about changes in the ways in which people form relationships with one another and that this, in turn, calls for changes in the emotional structures and modes of behavior of the people who live in such relationships. In order to prove this premise, he conducts a microscopic analysis of the concrete daily life of the secular upper class in the West and a macroscopic analysis of the structural and historical changes in Western society.  

3. The Civilizing Process in the West

To develop our discussion further, we should now examine Elias' civilizing process in greater detail. While the first volume of the Civilizing Process deals with the ways in which changes in social

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structures affect individuals—i.e., the transformation of the psychological structures and modes of behavior of the secular upper class of the West from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, all the way to the modern era, in terms of “civilization”— volume II of the work addresses the shifts in the overall social structures that brought about such changes in modes of behavior and psychological structures.

We can thus divide the civilizing process in the West into three large periods: 12th-15th century, 16th-early 18th century, and late 18th-20th century. Elias treats warriors (knights), court aristocrats (courtiers), and citizens as the main actors who shaped each period and focuses on “courtoisie,” “civilité,” and “civilization” as concepts that can comprehend these different groups’ sense of identity and socially accepted behavior.

The author’s discussion starts with the feudalization process that took place in Europe after the migration of various peoples in the 9th century. After going through territorial divisions due to population increase and the consequential shortage of land from the 9th century and onwards, reaching a climax in the 12th century, Europe witnessed the emergence of feudalism. From the apogee of its disintegration, however, feudalism slowly moved towards a monopolistic tendency, at the center of which was located the courts of great lords. With the formation in those great feudal courts of living quarters and social gatherings common to both men and women, stricter codes governing everyday conduct and rituals as well as a more refined sensibility came into being “Courtoisie” (“courtesy” or courtly manners) then was knights’ mode of behavior that was shaped perforce by external factors in these feudal courts.

This mechanism of monopoly was developed and intensified from
the 12th century to the 17th century when the modern absolutist state was established. The monopoly of the warrior class came to be divided among a handful of individuals and, eventually, to be concentrated on the monarch himself, who had taken over the means of physical violence and rights over taxes. As a result, warriors (knights) became increasingly courtly. Accelerated from the 16th century and onwards, such changes turned an increasingly greater number of warriors into court aristocrats (courtiers), who became vassals to the king. The concept of "civilité" (civility) denotes the more "sophisticated" modes of behavior and daily rituals that emerged then.

Although they at first had been forced by external factors to restrain impulsive feelings and actions and to behave in a "civilized" manner, by this period, court aristocrats (courtiers) did so through internalized control on the basis of fear of losing or reducing their social status, increased feeling of shame at or aversion to "uncivilized" behavior, and other reasons. In other words, the civilizing process spelled a transition from external coercion to self-restraint in terms of individual psychology.

With the growth of the citizenry in the late 18th century and the adoption of the courtly lifestyle by the upper crust of the citizenry through their contact with court societies, yet another change took place. The threshold of shame and aversion was lowered, internal control intensified, and daily conduct became increasingly sophisticated and refined. It was in this period, too, that the concept of "civilization" (civilisation) began to supplant that of "civilité." In Germany, on the other hand, nationalism had its effect and the concept of "culture," which only denoted intellectual achievements
such as religion, learning, and the arts, separately emerged and competed against "civilization."

According to Elias, the models of behavior that is viewed as "educated" or "civilized" in contemporary Western society were already formed in the stage of "civilité." In other words, rationalization and the civilizing process were not the products of the civil society but the fruits of the court society and, as such, closely related to the process through which the modern state came into existence.

Nevertheless, the loosening of sexual mores and the various informalizing tendencies of social relationships and etiquette in modern society prompt us to ask whether or not the civilizing process, as a long-term law of social movement, continues. In response to this question, Elias stressed that "civilization" was not a particular ideal state or a historical direction that we should aim at but a process, an unfinished one that endlessly progresses and regresses. According to him, the present state is but another process leading to a different state of "civilization."13

4. The Confucianizing Process in Korea

The East Asian counterpart to Western concepts such as "civilité" and "civilization" would be that of "propriety." Although it originated from the religious sacrificial rites of China, "propriety" later came to signify a moral order encompassing politics, society, and culture, finally to be established as a Confucian concept by

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13 Norbert Elias, Mummyeonghwa Geuyeong [The Civilizing Process] trans by Mi-ae Pak, vol II (Seoul Han-gil-sa, 1999) 413-31
Confucius himself as well as his followers. In the Confucian society of traditional China, "propriety" therefore was emphasized and valued as a means of cultivating oneself and governing the nation. The same held true for Korea also.\textsuperscript{14}

Though first introduced in the 6th-7th century, Confucian "propriety" was adopted in earnest in Korea, with the royal court as the leader, only in the 10th century, or the early years of the Goryeo Dynasty. But because the official religion of the dynasty was Buddhism, the royal court held both Confucian and Buddhist rituals. The modes of behavior among the aristocrats and the commoners, in particular, still bore the stamp of Buddhism and folk beliefs.

But the establishment of the Joseon Dynasty in the 14th century by Confucian literati who had imported Neo-Confucianism from Song China decidedly Confucianized the modes of behavior and daily rituals of the Korean people. Having chosen Neo-Confucianism as the ruling ideology of the nation, these learned men were deeply interested in the implementation of the Lesser Learning (小學; Chinese Xiaoxue; Korean Sohak; Japanese Shōgaku), a Confucian text on everyday rituals, and the Family Rituals of Master Zhu [Xi] (朱子家禮; Chinese Zhouzi Jiah; Korean Juja Garye; Japanese Shushi Karei), which addresses rites of passage such as coming-of-age ceremonies, weddings, and funerals. Indeed, the state sought to force the aristocracy—the Korean counterpart to the secular ruling class of the West—to adopt and practice Confucian rituals. Such measures failed, however, for even large numbers of the literati were still steeped in

\textsuperscript{14} Young-jun Koh, Joseon Jungsa Yehak Sasangsa [A History of the Study of Confucian Rites During the Mid-Joseon Dynasty] (Seoul: Han-gil-sa, 1995)
practices originating from Buddhism and folk beliefs.

It was with the emergence of untitled provincial Neo-Confucian scholars in the 16th century that the Confucian ethics and rituals stipulated in the Lesser Learning and the Family Rituals of Master Zhu finally came to be put into practice in earnest. In the precepts to be handed down to their descendants, these scholars recorded Confucian rituals that were practiced in their households, thereby declaring their cultural superiority over the commoners. In addition, Neo-Confucian literati without official posts strongly demanded that the central government implement the teachings of the Lesser Learning and the Family Rituals of Master Zhu on a national scale. Moreover, with a heightened academic interest in “propriety,” the study of Confucian rites developed and numerous etiquette manuals and conduct books came to be written.

Because they envisioned “propriety” as the social practice and actualization of the heavenly principle (天理; Chinese tianli; Korean cheolli, Japanese tenri), which was the Neo-Confucian ideal, untitled provincial Neo-Confucian literati believed that the correct practice of “propriety” was identical to the correct realization of the heavenly principle in society. This in turn led to arguments in the royal court over the “correct” practice and implementation of “propriety,” which continued from the 16th century and onwards. The two “ritual controversies” (禮訟)—literally, in Korean, “litigations on propriety”—that took place in the late 17th century was the climax of these conflicts.¹⁵

Through such processes, Confucian modes of behavior and rituals were well established among the aristocracy by the late 17th century. The following century began to see the further spread of these values among technical officers and local government clerks as well as commoners, which was made possible by these non-aristocrats' rise in economic status. By the 19th century, Confucian modes of behavior and rituals permeated the entire society. Consequently, a large part of traditional customs and values that still exist in South Korea today are Confucian. According to a survey conducted several years ago by the Institute for Religious Studies at Seoul National University, only 0.5% of the respondents viewed Confucianism as a religion. 94.5% replied, however, that their ethical codes and lifestyles were nevertheless based on Confucianism.

5. Similarities and Differences

You will have sensed a number of similarities between Elias' civilizing process in the West and the Confucianizing process in Korea that I have just surveyed, especially in terms of the historical periods involved, social class of the leaders of social changes, and the directions and causes of such changes. Indeed, Elias tentatively proposed in the Civilizing Process, during his comparison of China with Western Europe, the possibility of applying his civilization curve to non-Western societies. I too am of the opinion that an attempt to

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16 Despite their conscious eradication of all "feudal" customs and ideas and inculcation of "socialist" values, even North Koreans are said to be surprisingly Confucian in their moral views, daily conduct, and personal relationships. Naturally, the same holds true for ethnic Koreans overseas.
apply his theory of civilization to East Asian or Korean society would not be without significance.

First of all, Elias' concepts such as “civilité” and “civilization” are similar in many ways to the East Asian concept of “propriety.” Due to their legalistic premise, Western scholars have failed to understand “propriety” thoroughly and, by extension, East Asian society. By adopting the concepts “civilité” and “civilization,” however, we will be able to approach historical truth far more closely.

Second, “figuration,” one of the key concepts of Elias' theory of civilization, helps to understand Confucianism, which emphasizes human relations and views the space of everyday life from an organic standpoint. The concept of “figuration,” which encompasses relationships from those between two individuals to those of the family, school, society, and state and which states that, at each stage, interdependence among the parties involved increases, is structurally similar to the key concepts and precepts of Confucianism: “cultivate oneself, manage one's household, govern the nation, and pacify the world” (修身齊家治國平天下) and “governance through propriety” (禮治).

17 Regarding the relationship between propriety (rites) and law, see Jae-ryong Yi, Joseon Ye-ui Sesang-eseo Boep-ui Tongch'i-kkan [From the Idea of Propriety to Legalism During the Joseon Dynasty] (Seoul: Yemun Seowon, 1995).

Third, Elias’ view of the civilizing process as a transition from “external coercion” to “self-restraint” helps to shed light on the case of traditional Korean society, where “propriety” increasingly assumed the nature of not only purely external formalities and rituals but also of inner meaning and moral codes of behavior. Needless to say, the Confucian concepts “overcome one’s desires and return to propriety” (克己復禮) and “strike out human desire and return to the heavenly principle” (存天理去人欲) are illustrative of the self-regulatory aspect of “propriety.”

Finally, Elias’ sociohistorical approach—whereby he periodizes the civilizing process in the West, establishes the principal actors in each period, and focuses on the overall structural continuity—is extremely useful for analyzing the Confucianizing process in Korea, which took place over a comparatively long period of time—highly attractive to me as a historian.

It is then no coincidence that there are many similarities between Elias’ depiction of the civilizing process in the West and the Confucianizing process in Korea. Nonetheless, however, there are limitations to an application of his theory of civilization to the process through which traditional Korea was Confucianized.

Despite the similarities, there exist a number of disparities between Elias’ concepts such as “civilité” and “civilization” and the Confucian idea of “propriety.” This is especially true of the fact that, unlike “civilité” and “civilization,” “propriety” also contains an academic meaning. Consequently, unlike Korea, the West did not witness academic and political arguments on its version of “propriety.”

In addition, Elias firmly concludes that religions including Christianity failed to affect the civilizing process in the West in any
way. Had Christianity had a considerable influence, he would surely have called it the "Christianizing process" instead of the "civilizing process." Elias thus writes in the Civilizing Process: "In itself, religion cannot affect civilization or the control of one's emotions. On the contrary, religion is civilized only to the extent that the class who support that society and its religion are."¹⁹

On the contrary, the influence of Confucianism over East Asian, and especially medieval Korean, society was absolute. As such, Confucianism, though not a religion, may be said strongly to resemble religions and ideologies. This is also why I have called the process through which Confucian modes of behavior and rituals came to be established in Korea the "Confucianizing process" instead of the "civilizing process." In addition, the civilizing process in Korea cannot be explained in terms of the emergence of the modern absolutist state, for, unlike Europe, Korea and China were politically centralized from earlier on. As such, the Confucianizing process in Korea occurred earlier than in the West and largely through the voluntary will of the leading group rather than external coercion.²⁰

Nevertheless, Elias' theory of civilization contributes in many ways to our understanding of the Confucianizing process in Korean society. In addition, the Civilizing Process, which was penned from a culturally relativistic standpoint, can be of considerable help in overcoming orientalism. Indeed, he alludes in his work to the fact

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¹⁹ Elias, vol I, 382.

²⁰ In his account of an academic dialogue with Elias, Jae-hyeon Choe states that the author expressed deep interest in the fact that, in Confucian cultures, civil officials subordinated and controlled military officials from an earlier date. See Choe, "Munmyeonghwa Gwajeong."
that the Chinese saw the knife-using Europeans as "barbaric" and goes on to evaluate China as a more "civilized" nation. But, of course, this does not mean that the author viewed China as being superior to Europe; he only meant that the two societies were at different stages of the civilizing process.

At the end of the 19th century, imperialist nations saw Korea as a country yet mired in "barbarity" and themselves as "enlightened" or "civilized." Consequently, they argued, it was to free Korea from her stage of "barbarity" and to "civilize" her that they were trying to conquer and colonize her. To this Western logic, however, Koreans responded thus: "Korea is already a nation 'enlightened' by Confucianism. So what need is there for our further 'enlightenment'?" In other words, the very same words—e.g., "civilization" and "enlightenment"—signified entirely different things to each of the parties involved.

Let us then return to the beginning. In the first section, I discussed the Korean practice of eating dogs. Westerners criticize the custom probably because, to borrow from Elias' theory, Koreans continue to commit this unpleasant, revolting, and "less civilized" act.

At the same time, however, these "civilized" nations do not seem at all concerned about their own acts—racism, indiscriminate murder of civilians, export of arms, and indifference to genocide around the world and famine in Africa. Is it because there only exist either "more civilized" or "less civilized" societies but no "barbaric" ones? In my view, this surely is food for thought.

21. The newly Westernized Japan, of course, was one of these nations. It is perhaps ironic that, not very long before, she had been forcibly opened to the world at gunpoint after centuries of official seclusion by Western nations.
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<Abstract>

**The Civilizing Process in the West and Korea: Norbert Elias’ Theory and Confucianism**

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The purpose of this paper is to review the civilizing process in the West and Korea, especially to compare Norbert Elias’ theory of civilization with the Confucianizing process in Korea.

It is precisely because of his analysis of the civilizing process in Western Europe in terms of historicism and cultural relativism that I come to take an interest in Norbert Elias (1897-1990), in addition to the fact that manners and rituals, the main topics of his works, are closely related to the East Asian concept of “propriety” (禮, Chinese li, Korean ye; Japanese rei, also translated as “rites” or “rituals”), my primary field of research. By virtue of such relativism, his research would seem to contribute considerably to the overcoming of the West’s prejudice against the East and imperialist nations’ bias against their colonies—in other words, orientalism.

Elias’ theory of civilization is elucidated in the Civilizing Process (volumes I and II), his major work. Elias established his unique theory of the civilizing process in this work through a careful study of the civilizing process in the West in relation to changes in social structures, psychological attitudes, and behavioral structures.
theory of the civilizing process therefore is noteworthy in several aspects.

There are a number of similarities between Elias’ civilizing process in the West and the Confucianizing process in Korea, especially in terms of the historical periods involved, social class of the leaders of social changes, and the directions and causes of such changes. However, there are limitations to an application of his theory of civilization to the process through which traditional Korea was Confucianized.

Nevertheless, Elias’ theory of civilization contributes in many ways to our understanding of the Confucianizing process in Korean society. In addition, the Civilizing Process, which was penned from a culturally relativistic standpoint, can be of considerable help in overcoming orientalism.

In the first section, I discussed the Korean practice of eating dogs. Westerners criticize the custom probably because, to borrow from Elias’ theory, Koreans continue to commit this unpleasant, revolting, and “less civilized” act.

At the same time, however, these “civilized” nations do not seem at all concerned about their own acts—racism, indiscriminate murder of civilians, export of arms, and indifference to genocide around the world and famine in Africa. Is it because there only exist either “more civilized” or “less civilized” societies but no “barbaric” ones? In my view, this surely is food for thought.