

Changes in the Concept of *Yulli* during the Enlightenment Period in Korea

Yi Hye Gyung

This article examines how the concept of *yulli* 倫理 (“ethics”) was regarded during the modern period of enlightenment (*Gaehwagi*) in Korea. We first examine how the term *yulli* was employed in Japan, since it played a key role in transmitting to Korea the elements of modern Western civilization that it had already adopted; in addition, Japan shared the common traditions of Confucianism and Chinese characters with Korea. We can obtain a better understanding of the use of *yulli* in modern Korea by identifying the similarities and differences vis-à-vis its use in Japan. The use of *yulli* in pre-modern Korea is then considered. During the Joseon period, the term *yulli* referred to “the objective principles of beings” as well as “the virtue of the mind” in a Neo-Confucian context. This is then followed by a discussion of the semantic shift that the term *yullihak* 倫理學 (a translated term for the Western concept of “ethics” imported from Japan) underwent during the modern period of enlightenment in Korea. Introduced as a discipline of modern Europe, *yullihak* allowed Korean intellectuals to perceive *yulli* as an element of civilization and take pride in the fact that this element of civilization had a long tradition in Korea. Finally, the way in which Korean intellectuals of the enlightenment period began to present the *yulli* of Korea as a distinctive and key strength of their nation is discussed. It is demonstrated that Korean intellectuals believed the reason Korea faced the loss of its sovereignty was not because it was a savage society, but because it had focused too much on the “civilization of *yulli*” to the detriment of a “materialist civilization.” Unlike the Japanese, this illustrates that Korean intellectuals did not differentiate between the ethics of modern Europe and pre-existing Neo-Confucianism ethics.

Keywords: Gaehwagi (the enlightenment period of Korea), Korea (Joseon dynasty), *Yulli* (倫理), Ethics, Civilization

Yi Hye Gyung (yhgyung@snu.ac.kr) is HK Research Professor in the Institute of Humanities, Seoul National University

Seoul Journal of Korean Studies 24, no. 2 (December 2011): 219-239.

© 2011 Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies

Introduction

This article considers how the concept of *yulli* 倫理 changed during Korea's enlightenment period (*Gaehwagi* 開化期)¹ from the perspective of the history of concepts or *Begriffsgeschichte*.² The ultimate goal is to examine the nature of Korean society at the time. Since the 1990s, the history of concepts has been applied to the study of Korea's modern enlightenment period in several fields of the humanities and social sciences in Korea.³ Concepts appear not only in theoretical discussions and literary texts but also in the wider context of everyday life. Therefore, it is imperative that a study of conceptual history be undertaken across a wider range of disciplines.

The period of enlightenment influenced many aspects of life and was a time of great upheaval after Korea's encounter with modern European civilization. The mainstream of Joseon intelligentsia believed that (as had been the case for other East Asian countries) European civilization could present an alternative worldview and concurrently provide alternative value systems and alternative principles of action that could replace the Sinocentric world order that had dominated Korean society. In addition, they came to regard the worldview of Social Darwinism as presenting a new set of principles of action on the basis of which social change could be initiated; however, the personal ethos that shapes *ethics* is less open to change and is the topic of this article.

The adoption of a new Social Darwinian worldview was a conscious and deliberate act propagated by mainstream Joseon intelligentsia and it can be assumed that such a change would have eventually been accompanied by a change in ethical principles. However, such a change would not have occurred easily, as ethical principles are deeply embedded within individual consciousness and guide everyday actions. I believe it is precisely those phenomena that do not easily change that determine the scope, and indeed the nature, of actual social change. Therefore, I hope to comprehend the exact nature of change experienced

1. The term *Gaehwagi* 開化期 refers to the period from the Gabo Reform of 1894 until the Japanese colonization of Korea in 1910 (Yeoksa bipyeong pyeonjip wiweonhoe, *Yeoksa yongeo baro sseugi* [Correct usage of historical terminology] (Seoul: Yeoksa bipyeongsa, 2006).

2. The methodological approach of conceptual history in which the appropriation of a concept through time is studied in order to gain an understanding of social history is best represented in the works of the German scholar Reinhart Koselleck, who first developed this approach in the 1960s; subsequently, it developed into the social historical semantics of Rolf Reichardt.

3. For an overview of recent research, see Kim Hyeonju, "Geundae gaenyeomeo yeongu ui donghyang gwa seonggwa" [Trends and results in the study of modern concepts], *Sangheo hakbo* 19 (2007): 205-241.

by the people of Joseon at the time by focusing on the way and extent to which the concept of *yulli* changed (*yulli* being both the traditional term for *ethics* and the translated term used from the Enlightenment period onwards to refer to modern Western *ethics*).

Joseon society was regulated by the social ideology of Neo-Confucianism prior to its encounter with modern Europe. A key feature of Confucianism (including Neo-Confucianism) is the absence of a division between *ethics* and politics because *ethics* provides the foundations for politics and social norms within Confucian philosophy.⁴ However, after encountering modern European civilization and faced with the situation of having to fight against and learn from modern Europe, Joseon intelligentsia came to believe that Korean society had no option but to modify its traditional principles of action in order to survive. The goal of these new principles of action was the survival of the Korean people; subsequently, such principles of action, widely declared beneficial to the Korean people, inevitably influenced the principles of individual action. It is as one of these new principles of action that a new kind of *ethics*, originating from modern European civilization, was introduced to Korea. All societies of all periods have their own set of *ethics*. Therefore, to the people of Korea, the “newness” of this new *ethics* was not felt as strongly as, for example, the “newness” of Social Darwinism or other Western concepts introduced in this period. Consequently, the new *ethics* of modern European civilization soon blended with the traditional *ethics* of Neo-Confucianism, and a new conception of *yulli* emerged in enlightenment-period Korea through this process of conflict and union.

The material analyzed in this paper consists mainly of texts published in newspapers and magazines because the pertinent issues of the times are reflected most clearly in these mass media publications. I will investigate how the concept of *yulli* was used and disseminated among the intelligentsia of Korea through an examination of relevant mass media publications; in addition, I will examine how this process was comparable to that of Japan. It is important that we examine the nature of this influence and how the concept itself evolved; as a product of the enlightenment period, the concept of *yulli* continues to influence recent times.

Finally, it should be noted here that the different conceptions contained within the common signifier of “*ethics*” will be distinguished and used in this paper as follows: “*ethics*” to denote the common noun usage; *ethics* [italicized] to denote the *ethics* of modern Western civilization which came to be translated

4. This is discussed in many Confucian texts, a key example being “Daxue zhangju xu” 大學章句序 [Preface to the Great Learning, by chapter and phrase] in which Zhu Xi 朱熹 says that “to govern well one should cultivate oneself” (修己治人).

in Japan and Korea; *lunli* when discussing the concept within the context of Chinese classical texts or Confucianism; *rinri* to denote the Japanese translation of the modern Western concept of *ethics*; *yulli* for the premodern Korean interpretation and “*yulli*” to denote the problematization of the concept of *ethics* following the introduction of Western concepts via Japan.

Rinri in Modern Japan

It was in modern Japan that *rinri* was first utilized to translate the Western concept of *ethics*. Borrowed from ancient Chinese texts, the concept of *rinri* 倫理 was recycled and used with a new semantic content in this process.⁵ The actual term used to translate *ethics* was *rinrigaku* 倫理學 and was a term newly coined by Japanese scholars⁶ that referred to the “study of *ethics*” as a scientific discipline established in modern Europe.⁷

The *Tetsugaku ji'i* (*Dictionary of Philosophy*),⁸ which provided the Japanese translations for concepts used in Western philosophy, translated *ethics* as *rinrigaku*. In using *rinri* in this way, the editors referred specifically to the following two sources: “Well versed in *lunli* 倫理”⁹ from the “Yueji” 樂記 section of the *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記) and “make *lunli* 倫理 right and loving kindness sincere”¹⁰ from Zhu Xi’s *Reflections on Things at Hand* (*Jinsilu* 近思錄). According to Zheng Xuan’s 鄭玄 (127-200) annotations on the *Liji*, “*lun* 倫

5. Morioka Kenji ed., *Kindaigo no seiritsu (goi)* [The establishment of modern languages (words)] (Tokyo: Meijishogen, 1991). In this book, Morioka explained that modern Chinese character-based words could be formed through the following six ways: substitution (置換), recycling-diversion (再生轉用), distortion (變形), borrowing (借用), sound borrowing (假借), coining (造語). According to this classificatory scheme, the term *rinri* 倫理 can be seen as having been formed through the process of recycling-semantic shift.

6. Inoue Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎 ed. *Tetsugaku ji'i* 哲學字彙 [Dictionary of philosophy] (Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku-sangakubu, 1881), 31.

7. The key study on the concept of *rinri* in modern Japan is Koyasu Nobukuni, “Kindai rinri gainen no seiritsu to yuku’e” [The establishment and development of the concept of *ethics* in modern times], *Shisō* 912 (2000): 4-24.

8. Inoue Tetsujirō ed., *Tetsugaku ji'i*

9. *Lunli* 倫理 appears in the “Yueji” 樂記 section of the *Liji* 禮記 in the following context: “Sound (音) is produced by the heart of the human being, and music (樂) is to be well versed in *lunli* 倫理. Therefore, animals know noise (聲) but not sound and the populace know sound but not music. Only the *junzi* 君子 may know music” (凡音者, 生於人心者也, 樂者, 通倫理者也。是故知聲而不知音者, 禽獸是也, 知音而不知樂者, 衆庶是也。唯君子為能知樂。)

10. The “Jiadao” 家道 section of *Jinsilu* 近思錄 fasc. 6: “正倫理, 篤恩義, 家人之道也。” This comes from the “Jiarengua” 家人卦 section of *Yichuan* 伊川易傳.

means similar in kind (*lei* 類) and *li* 理 is to divide.”¹¹ In the *Liji daquan* 禮記大全 (Great compendium on the Book of Rites), which was edited during the Ming Period, *lunli* is said to be “all categories of things having their own *li* 理.”¹²

According to the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, *lei* 類 is “to be similar in kind.”¹³ This term appears with the same connotation in the following passage of *Mencius*: “There is the Qi-lin among quadrupeds, the phoenix among birds, the Tai mountain among mounds and ant-hills, and rivers and seas among rain-pools. [Though different in degree], they are the same in kind (*lei* 類). So the sages among mankind are also the same in kind.”¹⁴ In other words, *lei* provides the basis for a broad sort of categorization where land animals, birds and humans can be regarded as separate groups. Although broader, the intended meaning of this term by ancient Chinese writers is similar to the modern concept of species. As such, *renlun* 人倫 can be taken to mean the group of humans. The phrase “the group of humans (*renlun* 人倫) come together”¹⁵ that appears in *Xunzi* 荀子 can be regarded as an example of *renlun* used in this original sense; however, in *Mencius*, when it is said “to teach the relations of humanity (*renlun*)” to the masses/populace, *renlun* refers to the five human relations (*wulun* 五倫).¹⁶ In other words, as can be seen in *Mencius*, *lun* 倫 also contained the meaning of “relations,” and by extension, the meaning of “the right order between human beings.” The second reference provided by the editors of *Tetsugakuji*’i – “make *lunli* right and loving kindness sincere” from the *Reflection on Things at Hand* – was selected with regard to this meaning of *lunli*.

The editors of *Tetsugaku ji*’i interpreted *lunli* to be the *li* 理 of the *lun* 倫, with *li* referring to the principle of beings and things. In other words, *lunli* was understood as the principle of being that each group (i.e. species) possesses, as well as the relationship of the *li* between these groups.

In *Tetsugakuji*’i, *rigaku* 理學 and *kagaku* 科學 were presented as translations for the Western concept of science.¹⁷ It is thus possible to observe that the editors

11. The “Yueji” section of *Liji zhushu* 禮記注疏: “倫猶類也, 理分也.”

12. The “Yueji” section of *Liji daquan* 禮記大全: “倫理, 事物之倫類, 各有其理也.”

13. “*Quan* 犬,” *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字: “類 is to be similar in kind, which is most strongly seen in dogs. This is why *lei* 類 comes from *quan* 犬” (類, 種類相似, 惟犬最甚)

14. Book 2, Part 1, “Gongsunchou 2” of *Mencius*: “麒麟之於走獸, 鳳凰之於飛鳥, 太山之於邱垤, 河海之於行潦, 類也. 聖人之於民, 亦類也.”

15. Book 10, “Fuguo” 富國 of *Xunzi*: “人倫竝處(同求而異道, 同欲而異知, 生也).”

16. Book 3, Part 1, “Tengwengong 4” of *Mencius*, “聖人有憂之, 使契爲司徒, 教以人倫. 父子有親, 君臣有義, 夫婦有別, 長幼有序, 朋友有信.”

17. Inoue Tetsujirō ed., *Tetsugaku ji*’i, 82.

of the *Tetsugakuji*'i regarded *li* as an “objective principle” that could be the subject of scientific research¹⁸ and thought that the *rinri* that appeared in the “*Yueji*” section of the *Book of Rites* and in *Reflections on Things at Hand* was an appropriate term with a similar meaning. For them, *ethics* was a science that studied objective principles (*li*) of the human group (*lei*) as well as the objective principles of human relationships.

This understanding of *rinri* is more clearly demonstrated in the work of the contemporary scholar Inoue Enryo 井上圓了 (1858-1919), *Rinri tsūron* 倫理通論.¹⁹ Here he introduced *rinrigaku* as the translated term for the Western concepts of *ethics*, “moral philosophy” and “moral science.”²⁰ After establishing “*rinrigaku*, or *ethics*, as the discipline which commands the actions of human beings through the *rontei* 論定 of the standards of right and wrong, and moral principles,” he presented the following statement in order to stress what he meant by *rontei*.

Rigaku 理學, in other words, the term “science,” refers to the logical exploration of various facts, based on which general principles are observed and established; a school of learning which is based upon a scientific system. Physics, biology etc. are all such sciences ... according to what I have observed, the field of *shūshingaku* 修身學 also examines various facts and logically establishes certain laws. As I regard this as a kind of *rigaku* 理學, I will use the term *rinrigaku* 倫理學.²¹

Thus, *rontei* means to logically establish principles. In *Rinri tsūron*, Inoue Enryo distinguished *rinrigaku* from *shūshingaku* 修身學, the learning of how to cultivate oneself, as the former was a science whereas the latter, he argued, was based upon assumption and conjecture.²² In the early Meiji period, *shūshingaku* had been used by Fukuzawa Yukichi 福澤諭吉 (1835-1901) as the translated term for “moral science.” Although Fukuzawa came to believe that Confucianism was no longer appropriate to the times and adopted the *ethics* of modern European civilization, he did not make a clear distinction in terms of terminology between

18. This position can be seen in another volume – *Rinri shinsetsu* 倫理新説 – published by Inoue Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎 (1855-1944) around the same time as the *Tetsugakuji*'i. Here he maintained that “In order to advocate *rinri* one should ...investigate if there is a theoretical foundation of *rinri*.” Inoue Tetsujirō, “*Rinri no daihon*” [The foundation of *ethics*] in *Rinri shinsetsu* [A new discussion of *ethics*] (Tokyo: Bunseido, 1884), reprinted in *Meiji bunka zenshū* [Collection of Meiji culture] Vol. 16, (Tokyo: Nihon hyoronsha, 1992), 415.

19. Inoue Enryo, *Rinri tsūron* [Outline of *ethics*], (Tokyo: Fukyusha, 1888).

20. *Ibid.*, 1.

21. *Ibid.*, 5-6.

22. *Ibid.*, 4-5.

it and Confucianism.²³ However, in the case of Inoue Enryo, *rinrigaku* and *shūshingaku* were regarded as distinctly different concepts. He regarded both Confucianism and all Western religions established prior to the Modern Age as belonging to the category of *shūshingaku* and argued that *shūshingaku* (including Confucianism) had outlived its usefulness.²⁴

Scholars of the early Meiji Period generally regarded Westernization as the path to modernization. Therefore, this attempt to oppress Confucianism through the adoption of *rinrigaku* can be understood as an extension of the position adopted by early Meiji scholars. However, this policy of Westernization was gradually transformed into a policy that stressed Orientalness or Japaneseness as a means of modernization. This was because Japanese scholars came to realize that underlying Western thought was an understanding of history based upon Enlightenment philosophy. According to the historical perspective that posited the unilinear development of “civilization,” Japan could only become a second-rate state at best; therefore, Japan was able to establish an identity that was different yet equal to the West in positioning themselves as belonging to and as the main representative of the East.²⁵ The scholars of modern Japan envisioned a Japanese population that acted voluntarily, as befitting the citizens of a modern state. However, that population also needed to adopt as their goal the independence and prosperity of the Japanese state: the population was supposed to embody the virtue of “shying away from selfishness and voluntarily loving one’s country.” Accordingly, a reassessment of Confucianism took place. The “benevolence” (jin 仁) of Confucianism, which is voluntary as it is based in human nature, was reinterpreted according to a nationalistic perspective. Representative scholars who adopted such an approach were Nishimura Shigeki 西村茂樹 (1828-1902) and Inoue Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎 (1855-1944).²⁶ They

23. Fukuzawa Yukichi’s curriculum for Keio Gijuku included the subject of “*shūshingaku*” 修身學, as a pseudo-science in addition to the subjects of mathematics and history. Sekiguchi Sumiko, *Kokumin todoku to gender* [National morality and gender] (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 2007), 18-19.

24. Inoue Enryo, *Rinri tsūron*, 3-6.

25. See Stefan Tanaka, *Japan’s Orient: Rendering Pasts into History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

26. For a discussion of Inoue Tetsujirō, see Yi Hye Gyung, “Yangmyeonghak gwa geundae ilbon ui gweonwijuui” [Yangming studies and authoritarianism in modern Japan], *Cheollhak sasang* 30 (2008): 3-35. For a further examination of Nishimura Shigeki, see Koyasu Nobukuni, Koyasu Nobukuni, “Kindai rinri gainen no seiritsu to yuku’e” [The establishment and development of the concept of *ethics* in modern times], *Shisō* 912 (2000): 4-24.

Inoue Tetsujirō played a central role in importing modern European civilization and was a key proponent of “national morality” (國民道德). As can be seen through the example of Inoue, a large section of the Japanese intelligentsia of this period did not regard the propagation of modern

promoted Confucianism as a “national morality” (*Kokumin todoku* 國民道德) and stressed its indigenous nature and its relevance to human action. In doing so they contrasted it to *rinrigaku*, which was theoretical and scientific in nature.²⁷

To summarize, the process by which the term *rinrigaku* came to be used in modern Japan, is characterized by the following features. First, *ethics* (translated as *rinrigaku*) was understood as a theoretical practice of research and considered an element of modern European civilization. Second, this newly adopted concept of *ethics* was regarded as different from traditional *ethics*, particularly the *ethics* of Confucianism. Third, as a concept different from the Western notion of *ethics*, the *ethics* of the Confucian tradition was first disparaged but later acknowledged and actively supported for its indigenous nature and its relevance to practice. The difference between *ethics* as a scientific discipline and the *ethics* of Confucianism was clearly perceived and created a common perception that Confucianism was related to practice. Confucianism, as a result, was regarded more positively as its practical aspect was reevaluated.

This term was soon exported to Korea along with other ideas of modern Western civilization. The way in which *ethics* was translated in Japan and the semantic shift of *lunli* 倫理 that accompanied this, which was the focus of this section, now has to be compared to the adoption of *ethics* in Korea. In examining the differences that existed between the two countries in terms of this process, the characteristic features of the *lunli* concept in Korea may be considered.

The “*Ethics*” of Joseon – Neo-Confucian *Yulli*

The term *yulli* often appears in the writings of Joseon literati. It is possible to observe that the term *yulli* was used at times by the Joseon literati in a way similar to its use in the section of the Book of Rites quoted in the *Tetsugakuji*'i (i.e. as the principle of beings and things). Yun Seongeo, a seventeenth century Joseon scholar, wrote in his “Reply to Jeong Ansuk” that “the beginning and end are not in accordance, and the head and tail are different. It never achieved

European civilization and the ushering of national morality as strictly different positions. In addition, it was common for the attitudes of individuals to follow the oscillations in the trends of these two positions. As is also discussed by Sekiguchi Sumiko (*Kokumin todoku to gender*), the generally accepted view is that national morality came to be advocated with the promulgation of the Meiji constitution.

27. For a discussion of how national morality came to be advocated in the late Meiji period, see Sekiguchi Sumiko, *Kokumin todoku to gender*.

what it meant to say, nor did it ever achieve *yulli*.”²⁸ What he implies by *yulli* here is something akin to consistency. In this sense, *yulli* referred to an “objective order” and was similar to its use in the “*Yueji*” section of the *Liji*. However, the Joseon Dynasty was a period in which Neo-Confucianism was viewed with the utmost respect and *yulli* was also often used to mean “patterning principle” (*i* 理) in relation to the Neo-Confucian thesis *seong jeuk i* 性即理 (human nature is nothing but principle). According to Neo-Confucianism, *i* could be understood as the objective principle of things and the virtue of the mind (*sim ji deok* 心之德).²⁹ While *i* constituted the essence of humans, it was not fully realized in reality and came to be approached as that which ought to be strived for. In Neo-Confucianism, *i* was the objective order of the universe, the morality of benevolence (*in* 仁), righteousness (*ui* 義), propriety (*ye* 禮) and wisdom (*ji* 智), which formed the essence of human beings, and the principle that all individuals should strive for.³⁰

Yulli can be understood as the *i* of humans; within the context of Neo-Confucianism, *i* refers to the principle of being for humans and the morality that constitutes the essence of human beings. However, while all things have their own *i* in the world of Neo-Confucianism, only humans are able to exhibit that *i* in its entirety in the actual world.³¹ Therefore, in the actual world, *yulli* and *i* have the same connotations (i.e. of morality as well as the essence of human beings). In the case of “to care only about profit and loss in the world is to be an

28. Yun Seongeong 尹宣舉 (1610-1669), from “Reply to Jeong Ansuk” (書·答鄭晏叔) in *Noseo seonsaeng yugo sok* 魯西先生遺稿續 Fasc. 1, as published in Minjok munhwa chujinhoe ed., *Hanguk munjip chonggan* 韓國文集叢刊 [Collection of Koreans Writings] Vol. 120 (Seoul: Minjok munhwa chujinhoe, 2005), 437.

29. In “King Hui of Liang Part 1” in Book 1 of *Mengzi Jizhu* 孟子集註 [Collected annotations on the Mencius], it is said that “benevolence (仁) is the virtue (德) of the mind (心) of and the principle (理) of love (愛)”, and Book 20, Chapter 110 of *Zhubi yulei* 朱子語類 elaborates on this with the following passage: “*li* (理) is human nature (性). As there exists within [human beings] the principle (理) of love (愛), if this moves and expands outwards, there is nothing that is not love (愛)” (理便是性。緣裏面有這愛之理，所以發出來無不愛)。

30. In the following passage of the *Daxue huowen* 大學惑問, Zhu Xi maintains that “*li* 理 is the law of existence and the law of what ought to be done. All that exists between the heavens and earth which have sound and color, form and shape are things. If a thing exists, there exists the principle that makes such a thing exist, and that principle is that which ought to be done. This principle was provided by the heavens and is not that which can be acted upon by human beings.” (凡有聲色象而盈於天地之間者，皆物也。既有是物，則其所以為是物者，莫不各有當然之則，而自不容已。是皆得於天之所賦，而非人之所能為也。)

31. See Book 4, Chapter 41 of *Zhubi yulei*. All things, including human beings, are provided with *qi* 氣, but there are differences in the degree to which that *qi* is balanced or imbalanced, refined or coarse. It is said that animals are given an imbalanced and clogged *qi* and for that reason do not have wisdom, and that only humans have been endowed with the right *qi*.

animal; one cannot be a human being when ignorant of *yulli*,”³² *yulli*, in opposition to “caring only about profit and loss,” means “the principle of a human being.” In a Neo-Confucian sense, it refers to the morality that constitutes the essence of human beings. In the example of “the mind has almost become a thief. This is because conscience was lost due to hunger. *Yulli* was exterminated through lack of self knowledge,”³³ *yulli* is also used in this Neo-Confucian sense. Finally, *Yulli* clearly contains the meaning of “what ought to be done” as in the example of “*Yulli*, which beings and things ought to follow.”³⁴

The concept of *yulli* as understood within the context of Confucianism (and Neo-Confucianism) continued to be used in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. This was not limited to the *Hwangseong Sinmun*, which acted as a voice for reformist Confucian intellectuals. As we can see in the following excerpt taken from the *Daehan jaganghoe weolbo*, the *yulli* of Neo-Confucianism was used as a concept which stood opposite to the products of modern European civilization that were being introduced through Japan.

I too dislike cutting my hair short and wearing Western clothes, but I had no choice but to do so last year when I went to Japan. Upon my return home, my wife still acknowledges me as her husband, my son still acknowledges me as his father, my younger brother still acknowledges me as his elder brother and my daughter-in-law still acknowledges me as her father-in-law. This is because while form may have changed, *yulli* has not changed. I am not suggesting that you cut your hair and wear Western clothes. But if you make a distinction between form and *yulli*, it will naturally be possible to know what belongs to the former and what belongs to the latter. Given that we are currently in the position of adopting all of the West’s textbooks on state science, physics, and geometry and all of its rules on social laws, educational laws, and economic laws, is it not wrong of you to continuously dislike Western hairstyles and clothes and constantly say that they lack both *yum* and *i* (*munryun mui* 無倫無理)?³⁵

The issue contested here by Yi Geun is Western hairstyles and Western clothing. Those who object to their adoption, regard the wearing of Western hairstyles

32. Kim Sujeung 金壽增 (1624-1701), from “Reply to Yi Junggyeong” (書·答李仲庚), “Letters” (*seo* 書) in *Gokeunjip* 谷雲集 fasc. 5, as published in Minjok munhwa chujinhoe ed., *Hanguk munjip chonggan* Vol. 125, 231.

33. Yi Huyeong 李厚慶 (1558-1630), from “Gyeongul year” (庚戌), “Appeals to the King” (*socha* 疏筭) in *Oejaejip* 畏齋集 fasc. 3, as published in Minjok munhwa chujinhoe ed., *Hanguk munjip chonggan* Vol. 125, 230.

34. Kim Seok 金錫 (1634-1684), from “The 13th appeal to the King,” “Appeals to the King” (*socha* 疏筭) in *Sikam seonsaeng yugo* 息庵先生遺稿 fasc. 11, as published in Minjok munhwa chujinhoe ed., *Hanguk munjip chonggan* Vol. 145, 291.

35. Yi Geun 李沂, “The malaise of liking old things,” *Daehan jaganghoe weolbo* 9 (1907.03.25).

and Western clothing as lacking *yulli*. However, the author distinguished between “form” and *yulli*, and maintains that Western hairstyles and Western clothing fall into the category of “form,” not *yulli*. It is human relationships, such as the relationship between father and son or husband and wife, that the author sees as belonging to the category of *yulli*. Therefore, the author thinks that while “form” may change, *yulli* does not. The continued acknowledgement of a person as a father or husband (regardless of his hairstyle or clothing) derives from the mind or, to be more specific, the nature of the mind, which is the principle of the mind in the context of Neo-Confucianism.

When it is said that “[because animals] live according to the law of the jungle, in which the strong eat the weak, they cannot be reproached based on *yulli* or taught based on morality,”³⁶ *yulli* and morality can be understood as the principles that all human beings ought to have. From a Neo-Confucian perspective, *yulli* refers both to the principle of human existence and the principle of what ought to be done.

The following is an example that demonstrates that *yulli* and Confucianism are clearly connected.

Oh, in the four thousand years of the East’s existence, the sages arose and established teachings according to Heaven, and achieved the proper arrangement of *yulli* and political reform. Brighter than the sun and moon and greater than the universe, herein lies the origins of Confucianism.³⁷

The fact that the teachings of the sages, which followed Heaven, were seen to have brought about *yulli* and political reform clearly illustrates the Neo-Confucian perspective.

Also used during the modern period of enlightenment were terms such as *gangsang yulli* 綱常倫理,³⁸ (the *yulli* of the three bonds and five human relations)³⁹ and *samgang yulli* 三綱倫理 (the *yulli* of the three bonds).⁴⁰ Given that *yulli* was used in association with the Confucian norm of the Three Bonds, it can clearly be regarded as having contained the meaning of “what ought to be done.” It is possible to conclude during the enlightenment period in Korea that the term *yulli*

36. “Editorial: Being cautious about hurting each other,” *Hwangseong sinmun* (1907.09.12).

37. “Editorial: In urging Confucian scholarly society,” *Hwangseong sinmun* (1909.10.12).

38. *Gangchang lunli* 綱常倫理 first appeared in the writings of the Ming Dynasty in China, but it was not a term often used. Regarding its use in the Joseon Dynasty, seven examples of its use can be found in the *Hanguk munjip chonggan*. See the Hangukmunjip chonggan database (<http://db.itkc.or.kr/>).

39. “The opinion of the Deokchang 德昌 School,” *Hwangseong sinmun* (1908.08.22).

40. “Editorial: On reading the *Gyeongnam Ilbo*,” *Hwangseong Sinmun* (1909.10.24).

was used in a way that retained its original Neo-Confucian meaning prior to its use as a translated term that contained connotations of an objective order, inner virtue, and “what ought to be done.” Subsequently, the *yulli* of Neo-Confucian thinking continued to be used from the Joseon period into the enlightenment period.

If Korean intelligentsia intended to coin a translated term for the scientific discipline of *ethics*, as had taken place in Japan, and if they had intended to make a clear distinction between it and Confucianism, they would not have come up with *yullihak* 倫理學 as the Japanese had done, because (unlike the situation in Japan) *yulli* was a familiar term that had been in circulation throughout the Joseon period.

“Yulli,” a New Discipline but a Not Unfamiliar Concept

The frequent use of *yulli* in the writings of reformist Confucian scholars was probably triggered by the introduction of *yullihak* – the translated term for the Western concept of *ethics* – from Japan. *Ethics* had become an important discipline in Japan and in the West, and this trend was reflected in the Korean mass media. The *Hwangseong sinmun* 皇城新聞 frequently contained advertisements for textbooks, and those for *yullihak* often appeared. In addition, articles that announced the opening of schools and advertised places for students also introduced “*yulli*” as part of the curriculum.⁴¹

Those who believed that the introduction and adoption of Japanese and Western disciplines and curriculums was needed in order to maintain the existence of the Korean state expounded the characteristics of these disciplines with great enthusiasm. The following can be seen as a key example of this: “Natural science involves the study of the state of nature and it includes the disciplines of *yullihak*, psychology, etc.”⁴² This statement clearly demonstrates an understanding of *yullihak* that is similar to that of Japanese scholars who coined the term *rinrigaku* 倫理學 to translate the concept of “*ethics* as a kind of science.” Attempts were also frequently made to establish a straightforward link between civilization and *yullihak*. For example, H. Spencer was quoted in introducing *yullihak* as a discipline that “discussed the life principles of people who had arrived at the pinnacle of civilization” in an article in the *Taegeuk hakbo* 太極學報

41. “Advertisement: Our bookstore has approximately 3,200 different books imported from Shanghai,” *Hwangseong sinmun* (1906.06.01); “The current affairs of three schools,” *Hwangseong Sinmun* (1906.10.02).

42. Yu Geun 柳瑾 tr., “The principles of pedagogy,” *Daehan jaganghoe weolbo* 6 (1906.12.25).

that identified *yullihak* as a sub-category of philosophy.⁴³ In an article that examined the adoption of the European and American education system by the Japanese following the Meji Restoration, the subject of “*yulli*” was described as follows:

“*Yulli*” involves the teaching of the path towards true humanity and therefore is the most important of subjects. In the past, many countries of Europe and America confused religion and “*yulli*” and thought that to teach religion was to teach “*yulli*.” More recently, however, with the continued progress of civilization, it came to be recognized that this was a mistake. Thus, religion became that which could be freely believed while laws were established to enforce the following of “*yulli*.”⁴⁴

However, it must be pointed out that this statement is problematic; in advocating the establishment of laws that enforced the following of “*yulli*” as a feature of “civilization,” it represents as general a situation that was specific to Japan.⁴⁵ However, the focus of our attention here is the fact that “*yulli*” was clearly associated with civilization.

While it may have been associated with civilization, Korean scholars did not regard *yullihak* as an element unique to modern Western civilization. This is in contrast to the attitude of the Japanese scholars who first translated *ethics* into *rinrigaku*. *Yullihak* was not a new concept to Korean scholars nor was it regarded as a scientific discipline in Korea. As can be seen above, the term *yulli* – as understood within a Neo-Confucian context – often appeared in the writings of Joseon scholars. *Yullihak* may have been introduced into Korea as an element of civilization at the time; however, the real reason it was important was due to its role in the instruction on the path towards true humanity and not because it was a scientific discipline. Neo-Confucianism, of course, was a school of thought that was engrossed with “the path towards true humanity.”

In addition, Korean scholars throughout the enlightenment period did not differentiate between “*yulli*” and *susin* 修身. For example, *susin* appeared as the first subject in the February edition of the 1909 *Seobukhakhoe weolbo* that introduced the middle school curriculum of developed nations. Included underneath the heading of *susin* were concepts such as morality (*dodeok* 道德),

43. Hakhae jun 學海主人, “The basics of philosophy,” *Taegeuk hakbo* 21 (1908. 05. 24).

44. Yu Geun 柳瑾 tr., “The principles of pedagogy (continued),” *Daehan jaganghoe weolbo* 7 (1907. 01. 25).

45. At this time in Japan, in order to establish Shinto as the ‘public’ state ideology, ‘religion’ was demoted to the ‘private’ sphere. Naoki Sakai and Osamu Nishitani, *Sekaishi no kaitai: honyaku, shutai, rekishi* (Tokyo: Ibunsha, 1994), Chap. 3; cited from the Korean translation by Cha Seunggi, *Segyesa ui haeche* (Seoul: Yeoksabipyeongsa, 2009), 118.

general *ethics* (*yullihak ilban* 倫理學一般), conscience (*yangsim* 良心), ideals (*isang* 理想), the virtue of responsibility (*chaengmu deok* 責務德), and the study of cultivating virtue (*sudeok* 修德).⁴⁶ This demonstrates that *susin* and *yulli* were not regarded as separate concepts.

The Japanese scholar Inoue Enryo maintained a distinction between *rinrigaku* (a feature of civilization) and *shūshingaku* (a feature of the uncivilized) when he felt the need to differentiate between Confucianism and civilization. However, Korean scholars used these terms interchangeably, which proves that they did not differentiate between “*yulli*” – be it the newly introduced “*ethics*” of the West, or the traditional *yulli* of Confucianism – and *susin*. This also indicates that the distinctions that Japanese scholars made between theory and practice or civilization and the uncivilized, in translating “*ethics*” did not take place in Korea.

The following illustrates how Korean scholars regarded *yullihak*:

Yullihak involves realizing the truth of *illyun* 人倫 and finding a way to put that realization into practice. ... Another feature of *yullihak* is that, in valuing practice, it also involves, at times, the in-depth exploration of the profound aspects of the principles of *yulli*. However, the objective of this was not to create the principles of this discipline, but to contribute to the development of society through actual practice (*gunghaeng silcheon* 躬行實踐). This is how *yullihak*, as a science of practice, is different from physics etc.⁴⁷

Yullihak and physics were thus regarded together as belonging to the category of “science;” however, a distinction was also made between the two in that *yullihak* was a means of practice. The *yullihak* of Korea was regarded as a science, and in that sense resonates with the understanding of *rinrigaku* espoused by Japanese scholars. However, the fact that *yullihak* was regarded, above all, as a means of practice, demonstrates that it had more in common with that which Japanese scholars regarded as *shūshingaku*.

The following comes from *Seoyang yullihak youi* 西洋倫理學要義 [The Essence of Western Ethics], written by Gang Mae 姜邁 who attempted to examine the discipline that was *ethics*.

Given the current state of affairs, it may appear that *yullihak* is not necessarily required, but this is indeed not the case. Regardless of high or low social status, East or West, all origins of the principles of science lie in *yullihak*. This discipline developed first in East Asia during ancient times, which led East Asia to be admired

46. “An important discussion on academic subjects,” *Seobukbakhoe weolbo* 9 (1909.02.01).

47. Yi Haejo 李海朝, “Ethics” (倫理學), *Gibeunghakhoe weolbo* 5 (1908.12.25), Chap. 1 Introduction (Definition and Scope).

as a world of extreme virtue. Our practice of reading books and recognizing the principles of the world (*dokseo myeongni* 讀書明理) is only one aspect of this discipline. Based on this alone, it is difficult to emancipate the world and achieve true learning. Today, the truth of this discipline has become manifest, rather, in the *yulihak* of modern Western civilization. Therefore, we should consult its numerous theories and seek from these theories the motor for cultural development.⁴⁸

This quote represents a view similar to that of the modern Japanese scholars who first adopted *rinrigaku* in that it acknowledges the unrivaled development of the “ethics” of the West in modern times. However, the view of Gang Mae is somewhat different from that of the Japanese, for he explains that *yulihak* is an academic activity that is present regardless of time and place. Gang Mae accepts that the *yulihak* of Korea at the time was underdeveloped and argued that there was much to learn from the *yulihak* of Western civilization; however, he did not regard Korean *yulihak* as being entirely absent, only underdeveloped. Therefore, he did not share the view of Japanese scholars who regarded *rinrigaku* as a unique feature of modern Western civilization.

Gang Mae furthermore explained, “the origins of Western *yulihak* lie in the teachings of the Greek scholar Socrates.” With regard to the doctrines of Wang Yangming, Gang Mae maintained that “the most important aspect of *yangmyeonghak* 陽明學 is that, as with the other kinds of Chinese philosophy which preceded it, it is a form of *yulihak*.”⁴⁹ It can thus be observed that he regarded the *lunli* of China and the *ethics* of Socrates as belonging to the same disciplinary category.

To summarize, *yulihak* may have been accepted as a strong point of modern European civilization but it was not regarded as a unique feature of Europe, nor was it seen as being new to Korea. This attitude is reflected in the terms that were used by Korean scholars. In accepting *rinrigaku* as a study of theoretical matters, Japanese scholars promoted the concept of *shūshin* that dealt with the realm of practice. However, Korean scholars brought together terms that had opposite meanings in Japan to form compound nouns that were used similarly to “yulli.” Compound nouns were formed by adding *susin* or *yulli*, such as *yulli suyang* 倫理修養,⁵⁰ *susin yulli* 修身倫理,⁵¹ and *yulli susin* 倫理修身.⁵² The words that

48. Gang Mae 姜邁, “The essence of Western ethics,” *Daehanbakhoe weolbo* 8 (1908.10.25).

49. Kim Weongeuk 金源極, “Discussion on the learning of Wang Yangming,” *Seobukhakhoe weolbo* 19 (1910.01.01).

50. “Thirty years of history since the Meiji Restoration,” *Hwangseong sinmun* (1906.11.26).

51. Seo Byeonghyeon 徐炳瓌, “Editorial: Presenting the eight characters ‘susin yulli mobeom ihaeng’ 修身倫理 模範履行 to those who need to be educated,” *Seobukhakhoe weolbo* 8 (1909.01.01).

52. “The promotion of the Inheung School,” *Hwangseong sinmun* (1908.10.22).

were combined to form these terms did not have different meanings. Indeed, the reason that the words were used together may have been because scholars were worried that they would be wrongly thought of as having different meanings and the words were used together to make the meanings clearer; however, *yulli* and *dodeok* were still used interchangeably in an unconscious manner.⁵³

Yulli as Korea's Strength?

As examined above, *yulli* was not used as a translated term in Korea and although it changed due to the influence of the modern *ethics* of European civilization, it was not a newly adopted concept for the Koreans. The *yulli* of Korea may have been regarded as underdeveloped; however, this situation was not seen to require something entirely new to be imported. Interestingly enough, at some time during the period of enlightenment, the notion that *yulli* was a distinctive element of Korea that had been present from the Joseon period developed into the belief that *yulli* was preserved in Korea in a far superior state compared to other countries. *Yulli* also came to be regarded as a symbol of Korea in contrast to the products of Western civilization, as can be seen in the following:

The Western hats and canes of the Reformists represent nothing but imprudence and self-indulgence, and therefore lead to a “destruction of *yulli*.” On the other hand, the traditional scholarly garments (*simui* 深衣) and large belts (*daedae* 大帶) of the Conservatives act to shut their eyes and ears, making them lead the country and its people down the wrong path.⁵⁴

The above statement presents a warning against both extreme reformist and conservative thinking. It was cautioned that excessive conservatism would endanger the country's existence, while the excessive adoption of the West would bring about a “destruction of *yulli*.” What is reflected here is the notion that *yulli* – a positive element of Korea society that must be retained – was currently in danger of being destroyed by the new civilization of the West.

In the following quote, it is stressed that *yulli* is a feature of the collective group that shared the common identity of having been descended from Dangun 檀君.

53. “Editorial: The new educator of the Confucian scholars,” *Hwangseong sinmun* (1908.07.24).

54. “The teachings of Toegye Seonsaeng 退溪先生 are older than the teachings of Japan,” *Seobukhakhoe weolbo* 12 (1909.05.01).

There are certain attributes that we, the Han 韓 people, have which represent the nature of our nation. They are based on the teachings of four thousand years of our history which began with our forefather Dangun, as well as the ethical thoughts (*yullijeok sasang* 倫理的思想) of the 20 million people of the Buyeo tribe who are his descendants. They are ritual (*ye* 禮), righteousness (*ui* 義) and customs (*sok* 俗).⁵⁵

This view is associated with the discussions on state and nation that were intensified around the time that the *Japan-Korea Protectorate Treaty* of 1905 was signed. It was at this time that Sin Chaeho 申采浩 (1880-1936) propagated the notion of a homogenous nation (*danil minjok* 單一民族) by arousing the idea in the public consciousness that they belonged to a common kinship group represented by Dangun and the Buyeo tribe.⁵⁶ It is around the same time that the “ethical thought” (*yullijeok sasang*) of the Korean people came to be presented as a characteristic of this homogenous nation.

While there may have been differences in the tone of argument, it appears that intellectuals were in general agreement in regarding *yulli* as a characteristic feature of Korea.

In the history of the world, it is said that the prosperity of a nation is due to the benefits of civilization while the poverty of a nation is the result of savagery. The way in which civilization brings about prosperity must be studied and demonstrated. In terms of the types of civilization, there is the civilization of *yulli* and the civilization of materialism. The civilization of *yulli* achieves the refinement of order whereas the materialist civilization achieves the development of industry, with this development of industry providing the basis for prosperity. ... In the case of our Korean civilization it has been passed down that we should only revere the civilization of *yulli* and have contempt for the civilization of materials, which has led to a situation in which all talent for pragmatism has become entirely absent, and thus the demise of industry and the decline of national strength has reached its climax.⁵⁷

The European enlightenment view of history regarded historical development as unilinear with “civilization” unique to modern Europe; those who did not possess it (such as Korea) could only be regarded as “savage” societies. However, the Koreans had *yulli*, which was seen to represent their own civilization. This is

55. Mun Ilpyeong, “The crisis facing our youth (cont.),” *Taegeuk hakbo* 26 (1908.11.24)

56. For a further discussion on this matter, see Jeong Seotae, “Geundae gaemonggi ‘gungmin damnon’ gwa ‘munmyeong gukga’ ui sangsang” [The imagination of civilized nation-state in the Enlightenment Era], *Eomunhak nonchong* 28(2009): 63-78.

57. “Editorial: Materials are the basis for the prosperity of civilization,” *Hwangseong sinmun* (1908.09.27).

why the phrase “our Korean civilization” was possible in the previous quotation and why it could be said that the Koreans had revered the “civilization of *yulli*.” *Yulli* was approached as one of the two elements that civilization could be based on (the other being material culture). While the attitude towards *yulli* was not entirely uncritical (it was argued that the demise of industry and the decline of national strength were because the Korean people had only revered the civilization of *yulli*) it is clear that *yulli* was accepted as a characteristic Korean feature.

While there was the above view in which Korea’s unilateral development of the civilization of *yulli* was criticized, there was also another view in which a dichotomy between the civilization of *yulli* and the civilization of materials was established and the importance of the former was stressed.

While the *dodeok yulli* 道德倫理 of the Koreans is by far the most superior of all the nations of the world, the reason that [Korea] lies in such an inferior position is because its study of material culture is not up to the level of other nations. The urgent matter at hand is the need for the study of materials, but if the development of disciplines that deal with materials is not accompanied by the healthy patriotic spirit of the masses, the existence of disciplines of materials will not be of much use in escaping from a slave-like existence. Therefore, I believe that the most important issue facing education today is the cultivation of our national spirit.⁵⁸

This editorial identifies the study of *dodeok yulli* and the study of material culture as the respective strengths of East and West. In addition, Korea’s *dodeok yulli* is praised for being the best in the world. The reason then for the inferior situation of Korea was diagnosed as the inferiority of its material civilization. However, the author does not say that the material civilization is of the greatest importance. This is because he regards the “patriotic spirit of the masses” as being more important. Judging from the context of this passage, it can be suggested that “the patriotic spirit of the masses” or the “cultivation of national spirit” were regarded as specific fields of *dodeok yulli*. In Japan, the need for patriotism led to the establishment of “national morality” a term that reflected the deliberate attempts made to distinguish the concept from *rinrigaku*, the latter referring to a discipline imported from the West. However, imported *ethics* was never regarded in Korea as the exclusive property of European civilization and the need for such a distinction was not felt.

In the previously mentioned writings, which approached “*yulli*” from a variety of perspectives, a dichotomy between materials and *yulli* was established;

58. “Editorial: The need to cultivate our national spirit,” *Hwangseong sinmun* (1909.08.22).

some argued that the quest for material culture was more important than the quest for *yulli*, some argued the opposite. However, all of the writings shared the view that *yulli* was a feature that could be regarded as a key strength of Korea.

If the inferiority of the nation at the time was judged to have derived from an inferiority of material culture, it was necessary for Koreans to learn from Western civilization, from which the civilization of materials was thought to originate. However, if it was believed that the pursuit of *yulli* was more important, then the future of Korea was much brighter. This was because Korea was already seen to possess a *yullijeok* 倫理的 strength that other nations were envious of and was the driving force behind *yulli*:

The red sun rises from the East and so it is now the age of Eastern civilization. I have confidence that now is the chance for our nation to become a key player in the world stage. Then what ethos should our civilization be based upon? The richness of our people's "ethical thoughts" (*yulli sasang* 倫理想) is known throughout the world. Our people, who know the proper way (*do* 道) between king and vassal, between father and son, between husband and wife, between brothers, and between friends, will act as the sacred blade of justice and equity (*jeongui gongdo* 正義公道); they will get rid of those insurgents who overflow with greed, help and guide the weak, and suppress and overpower the arrogant, thereby extinguishing, beneath the clear, blue sky, the selfishness of the world; they will make themselves the master of morality and the incarnation of the right way of the heavens and earth (*cheonji daedo* 天地大道) and awaken all the people of the world.⁵⁹

Following the loss of sovereignty, the above aspiration was inevitably replaced by self-deprecation.

The Buddhism of India, the philosophy of China, and the *yulli* of Korea have clearly demonstrated their characteristics to the world, but due to political corruption alone, these elements have not been able to prevent the decline of the nation's fate or the loss of human rights.⁶⁰

Of course it is questionable whether the philosophy of China and the Buddhism of India can be thus linked; in addition, it is equally difficult to acknowledge such an association between the two and the *yulli* of Korea. However, regardless of the objective truth of the matter, it cannot be denied that Korea, faced with the threat of becoming a Japanese colony, needed to be consoled and promised a

59. Mun Ilpyeong, "Editorial: A discussion on the future civilization of Korea," *Taegeuk hakbo* 12 (1907.07.24).

60. "Editorial: The political system of the nation," *Hwangseong sinmun* (1910.07.13).

brighter future. It appears that “The *yulli* of Korea” was the small ray of light that people grasped onto.

Conclusion

Joseon society was significantly influenced by Neo-Confucianism, even more so than Japan and even China (Qing society). Confucianism was an ethical-political philosophy that believed that a peaceful world could be made through the ethical practices of individuals. In particular, Neo-Confucianism sought to expand the scope of the peaceful world that could be influenced by ethical individuals to include the entire universe. In addition, it was maintained that the principles of the universe were present within human nature and situated within the mind of the individual. Based on these premises, Neo-Confucian scholars believed it possible for humans to aspire to reveal the principles of the universe (*i* 理). Therefore, in accordance to the world-view of Neo-Confucianism, the ethical ability of the individual could generate peace in the universe.

Korean scholars consciously regarded themselves as agents who played an active role in maintaining the peace of the world. Central to this role, which they took pride in, was their ethical ability. The terms “*yulli*” and *yullihak*, which had been introduced via Japan, were accompanied by the notion of modern European “civilization.” To the Japanese scholars who first coined the term, *rinrigaku* 倫理學 presented them with the burden of having to adopt a new science (i.e. the Western discipline of “*ethics*”). However, for the Korean scholars, it allowed them to console themselves that Korea was a nation of “civilization” rather than one of savagery. Korean intellectuals of the enlightenment period regarded *yulli* as a key component of civilization and believed that the excessive focus on *yulli* (to the detriment of other components of civilization) was the reason why Korea was threatened by the civilization of modern Europe. In other words, they thought that the singular focus on the civilization of *yulli* and overlooking material civilization had led to this unfortunate result.

Korea inevitably learned from modern European civilization, not as a savage nation, but as a nation that upheld the civilization of *yulli*. In reality, Korea may have been the weakest of the three East Asian nations that faced a loss of sovereignty. However, the pride of the Korean people was seen to be much stronger than that of the Chinese or Japanese. This attitude may be understood in the context of the desperate measures undertaken by the Korean people who found their national sovereignty under threat. One of these measures was the

separation of the national spirit from its form. In attributing the Korean people to the former and the “physical container” of the state to the latter and in emphasizing the importance of the former over the latter, it could be argued that while the “form” of Korea might disintegrate, its people would not.⁶¹ This notion was also accompanied by an emphasis on the Korean people as comprising a homogenous nation. *Yulli* clearly acted to maintain the pride of the Koreans and provide them with hope for the future.

Of course, this “*yulli*” was not identical to the *yulli* of Neo-Confucianism. It was a transformed “*yulli*” of a period of “civilization” in the sense that it had taken on board notions of “the survival of the fittest” and “patriotism.” However, for the Koreans of the Enlightenment period, the concept was seen to embody a continuity that allowed them to maintain their identity in a changing world. In reality, this period witnessed a shift in value systems from a Sino-centric system to one based on modern Western civilization; subsequently, the Joseon Dynasty came to be regarded as a “barbarian state” in the eyes of the Japanese who had already adopted the modern civilization of the West.⁶² However, in establishing themselves as having a strong ethical agency the Koreans were able to maintain their identity.

The conclusions arrived at during the course of this article lead to the following questions that require further investigation within a broader time frame and through the analysis of a wider range of materials (such as court records and personal diaries). First, given that the *yulli* of the enlightenment period retained the Confucian notion of the *oryun* 五倫 (the five human relations), how much of an influence does Confucianism continue to have on the *yulli* of our times? Second, if the *yulli* of the enlightenment period was seen to be directly connected to the survival of the Korean people and therefore it was understood as that which served the interests of the whole, then what are the remnants of this negative understanding of *yulli* that continue to influence our modern day practices?

61. Faced with the threat of colonization by Japan, frequent discussions took place in Korea on separating the spirit from the form of the nation. One of the key advocates of this approach was Sin Chaeho, as can be seen from the following: “Oh. If the spirit of the nation has disintegrated, that nation has already collapsed, even though the form of the nation is intact, and if the spirit of the nation is intact, the nation still exists, even though the form of the nation has disintegrated.” Sin Chaeho, “Editorial: A nation of the spirit,” *Daehan Maeil sinbo* (1909.4.29).

62. For example, Fukuzawa Yukichi, in “Destruction is the beginning of construction” in the November 11, 1884 issue of the *Jiji shinpo* 時事新報, maintained that Joseon was “a literate barbarian nation” and that Japan must be responsible for its development.