The Origins of Korea’s Eurocentrism: A Study of Discourses on Gaehwa and Munmyeong*

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Power relations are reflected in discourse. In terms of global power relations, Eurocentric discourse assumes a Eurocentric world that idealizes the West at the expense of others. Under the global hegemony of the West, many societies have accepted the assumptions and ideas of Eurocentric discourse. During Korea’s early modern period, discourses on gaehwa (enlightenment) and munmyeong (civilization) reflected the rise of a Eurocentric world order and provided justification for the efforts to “modernize” Korea. This study analyzes the historical transformation of discourses on gaehwa and munmyeong vis-à-vis Eurocentric assumptions, focusing on the changes in the ways the national self and the West were perceived. Through an analysis of representative modern Korean newspapers from the 1880s to the 1930s, this study argues that it was not until the 1890s that a Eurocentric hierarchy between Korea and the West became manifested in discourses on gaehwa and munmyeong. This study also finds that the Eurocentric features of these discourses were relatively clear in the 1890s and 1900s but came to be fairly indistinct in the 1920s in the wake of World War I.

Keywords: Gaehwa (enlightenment), munmyeong (civilization), discourse, Eurocentrism

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Introduction

Discourse or knowledge, as a system of relations among dispersed elements governed by "rules of formation," is one of many windows through which power relations can be viewed and studied. As Foucault noted, "the exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power." In terms of global power relations, Eurocentric discourses assume a Eurocentric world that idealizes the West at the expense of others. With regard to global history, such discourses tend to assume that "the patterns discerned by analyzing pan-European history and social structure are universal patterns ...." Gang Jeongin has argued that Eurocentrism consists of three main propositions: first, that modern Western civilization is at the highest stage of human progress; second, that the historical path along which Western civilization has developed is universal and is applicable to all human histories; and third, that non-Western societies can progress only through civilization or modernization that imitates Western civilization. He summarized these propositions as European (or Western) supremacy, universalism, and Westernization.

Since its rise to global political economic power, the West has diffused various values and worldviews that implicitly or explicitly contain Eurocentric assumptions to construct and justify the Eurocentric world order. As for the historical construction of the hierarchy between the West and the non-West, Hobsbawm noted that "the novelty of the nineteenth century was that non-Europeans and their societies were increasingly, and generally, treated as

inferior, undesirable, feeble and backward, even infantile.” With regard to
colonialism, he added that “[non-Europeans] were [treated as] fit subjects for
conquest, or at least for conversion to the values of the only real civilization ....”

Under the global hegemony of the West, many societies have accepted the
basic assumptions and ideas of Eurocentric discourses. Faced with external
threats during the colonial era, some Asian countries experienced a paradoxical
situation in which they had to participate in the game set by the West in order
to resist it. Thus, the West was identified as the most significant other for those
societies in their modernization processes, either as a positive or negative
referent. Regarding the referent roles of the West in asymmetrical global power
relations, Hall noted the following:

First, it allows us to characterize and classify societies into different categories – i.e.
“western,” “non-western.” . . . Secondly, . . . It functions as part of a language, a
“system of representation” . . . for example, “western” = urban = developed; or
“non-western” = non-industrial = rural = agricultural = under-developed . . .
Thirdly, it provides a standard or model of comparison. . . . Fourthly, it provides
criteria of evaluation against which other societies are ranked and around which
powerful positive and negative feelings cluster . . . .

The late nineteenth century witnessed a change in Koreans’ perception of the
world. It was the time when Koreans began to recognize the significance of
European power and, thus, to embrace Eurocentric interpretations of the world.
The previous Confucian ethics-based perception of the West as “barbarians”
was being replaced by a new awareness of the West as “civilized.” Recognizing

7. Gang Jeongin, Seogu jungsimjuni reul neomeoseo [Beyond Eurocentrism] (Seoul: Acanet,
2004).
Postmodernism and Japan, ed. Masao Miyoshi and H. D. Harootunian (Durham, N.C.: Duke
9. According to Dittmer and Kim, positive reference groups are those with which “a state desires
to associate itself” and negative reference groups are the ones “whose opposition serves to
dramatize the importance of defending the values of ‘us’ against ‘them’.” See Lowell Dittmer and
the seriousness of the new world order in the “age of empire.”¹¹ Koreans became curious about the secret of the power of Western countries. Pursuing national wealth and strength, *gaehwa* (enlightenment) theorists in the late nineteenth century endeavored to modernize Korea by modeling it after the West. In terms of discursive relations, Korea began to be incorporated into a Eurocentric world order supported by Eurocentric discourses, and it began to regard the West as a primary positive referent in its modernization process.

The discourses of *gaehwa* and *mummyeong* (civilization) reflected the rise of the Eurocentric world order and provided justification for the efforts to “modernize” Korea. Echoing the civilization discourse of the West, which was premised upon a distinction between the “civilized” and the “uncivilized,” *gaehwa* and *mummyeong* discourses supposed a hierarchical distinction between *gaehwa* and *mi-gaehwa* (unenlightenment), and between *mummyeong* and *yaman* (barbarism) respectively. Within these discursive frameworks, the *gaehwa* theorist Yu Giljun (1856–1914) categorized countries into a three-tier classification system: *gaehwaguk* (enlightened country), *ban-gaehwaguk* (half-enlightened country), and *mi-gaehwaguk* (unenlightened country).¹²

In those discourses, the non-West tended to be represented as the deficient counterpart to the sufficient West.¹³ Set as the deficient entity, a *mi-gaehwaguk* continuously dreams of achieving the status of *gaehwa* or *mummyeong* due to a feeling of shame emanating from the self.¹⁴ In this regard, *gaehwa* and *mummyeong* frameworks contributed to the construction of Koreans’ “auto-

¹¹ Hobshawm, *The Age of Empire*.

¹² Yu Giljun, *Seoyu gyeonmun*, trans. Heo Gyeongjin (Seoul: Seohaemunjip, 2004 [1895]), 394–5. Having had Yu as his disciple, Fukuzawa Yukichi, an influential Japanese modernist, similarly categorized societies into three stages: the “primitive,” the “semideveloped,” and the “civilized.” He argued, “When we are talking about civilization in the world today, the nations of Europe and the United States of America are the most highly civilized, while the Asian countries, such as Turkey, China, and Japan, may be called semideveloped countries, and Africa and Australia are to be counted as still primitive lands.” See Wm. Theodore de Bary, Carol Gluck, and Arthur E. Tiedemann, eds., *Sources of Japanese Tradition: 1600 to 2000*, vol. 2 (abridged), part 2, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 35.


¹⁴ Gil, “‘Dongnip sinmun’ ‘Maeil sinmun’ e suyong doen ‘mummyeong / yaman’ damnon.”
Orientalism,” by assuming that what was desired by Korean society was something already existent in Western societies.\footnote{As for auto-Orientalism, Harumi Befu noted that “[i]t is a process of accepting the Orientalism of the West (Said 1978) by the very people who are being Orientalized.” In a similar vein, Mora referred to “internalized Orientalism” as an attitude that “[t]he East represents and expresses itself from the eyes of the West and with the image which the West fictionalized for it.” Lee used the concept of “bokje Orientalism” (copied Orientalism) in a similar context. See Harumi Befu, Hegemony of Homogeneity: An Anthropological Analysis of Nihonjinron (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2001), 127; Necla Mora, “Orientalist Discourse in Media Texts,” International Journal of Human Sciences [Online] 6, no. 2 (2009): 418; Lee Oksun, Uri an in Orientalism [Orientalism within us] (Seoul: Pureun yeoksa, 2002).}

Andre Schmid examined the discourses of *gaehwa* and *mummyeong* in terms of early Korean nationalists’ production of national knowledge and construction of nationalism in the late nineteenth century.\footnote{Andre Schmid, Korea Between Empires, 1895–1919 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).} For him, those discourses were the frames of knowledge in which Korean nationalists configured the position of modern Korea in the global order led by the West. As they reflected globalizing processes that were characterized by the expansion of capitalist modernity, he argued, early Korean nationalism was mainly the result of the interactions of both nationalizing and globalizing forces.

The discourses of *gaehwa* and *mummyeong* reflected social Darwinism, another prevalent ideology in early modern Korea. Vladimir Tikhonov argued that the “civilized” were regarded as the “fittest” in the evolutionary history of the world, and the victimization of the “unfit” was naturalized.\footnote{Vladimir Tikhonov, Social Darwinism and Nationalism in Korea: the Beginnings (1880s–1910s): “Survival” as an Ideology of Korean Modernity (Leiden: Brill, 2010).} The hierarchical classifications of societies and the domination of the weaker by the stronger were justified by the logic of the “survival of the fittest.” In this respect, Tikhonov contended that civilization was regarded as “predominantly masculine, ruled by the ethics of competition and conquest,” which became a ground for Korean intellectuals’ pursuit of muscular nationalism and masculinity.\footnote{Tikhonov, Social Darwinism and Nationalism in Korea, 63.}

Korean researchers tend to focus on the Orientalistic assumptions of the discourses reflected in the binary distinctions, e.g., *mummyeong* and *yaman*. The main focus of research has been the exploration of how Korea’s early modern self was marginalized in those new discourses. However, little attention has been paid to the temporal change of Koreans’ perceptions of national self and the West reflected in those discourses, which is significant in broadening the understanding of their historical nature. Thus, the historically more nuanced
and complicated nature of the discourses, in relation to the images of the West in particular, has not yet been appropriately examined. In Schmid's work, for instance, gaehwa and munmyeong discourses as a reflection of globalizing forces appear basically as unchanging and constant across time and space.

By concentrating on the varying images of the West in relation to national identity, this study analyzes the long-term transition of the basic assumptions and implications of the discourses from the 1880s to the 1930s. The main research question is proposed as follows: How did discourses of gaehwa and munmyeong, as historical constructs, transform Koreans' assumptions and connotations concerning the representation of the West and national self in relation to changes in national and international circumstances? Special attention is paid to the temporal change of the discursive hierarchy between Korea and the West concerning Eurocentric assumptions. To answer the research question, this study analyzes six historical newspapers representing Korea's early modern era: the Hanseong sunbo (1883–1884), the Hanseong jubo (1886–1888), the Dongnip sinmun (1896–1899), the Daehan maeil sinbo (1904–1910), the Chosun ilbo (1920–), and the Dong-a ilbo (1920–).19

This paper is organized in three main sections. The first one discusses the historical context in which the new perceptions of the West emerged in the 1880s. The second section analyzes the Eurocentric constructions of national identity and the West, reflected in the concepts of gaehwa and munmyeong in the 1890s and 1900s. The last section examines the crisis and reconstruction of the munmyeong discourse in the 1920s and 1930s.

19. For Hanseong sunbo and Hanseong jubo, I referred to Jeong Jinseok, ed., Hanseong sunbo Hanseong jubo: Beonyeokpan [Hanseong sunbo Hanseong jubo: Translation] (Seoul: Gwanhun keuleop sinyeong yeoungu gigeum, 1983). I focused on the sections “gakguk geumsa” (international news) in the Sunbo and “sau” (editorial) in the Jubo, which were especially relevant to the perceptions of the West and international affairs. Using seven keywords such as “seooyang” (the West), “oeguk” (foreign country), “seonjin” (advanced), “munmyeong” (civilization), “gaehwa” (enlightenment), “Gurapa” (Europe), and “yaman” (barbarianism) in the Korea Integrated News Database System, I obtained in total 326 editorials, 81 for the Dongnip sinmun and 245 for the Daehan maeil Sinbo. For manageability, I limited the search to editorials as it was one of the article types that best represented the newspapers’ values and perspectives. Using “munmyeong” and “yaman” as keywords, I obtained 353 articles for “munmyeong” and 62 for “yaman” from the Chosun archive, and 410 cases for “munmyeong” and 60 for “yaman” from the Dong-a data base. As there was no major newspaper published by Koreans in the 1910s, this study did not include this period.
Appreciating the Power of the West: The *Hanseong sunbo* (1883–1884) and the *Hanseong jubo* (1886–1888)

During the nineteenth century, the political-economic gap between the West and the non-West widened rapidly. During the 1880s, there were “two sectors combined together into one global system: the developed and the lagging, the dominant and the dependent, and the rich and the poor.” The dominant discursive framework that interpreted and justified this gap was the discourse of civilization, which was based on the hierarchical distinction between the “civilized” and the “uncivilized.”

For Koreans, the late nineteenth century was the period when the significance of Western expansion began to be recognized. Their traditional view of “Western barbarians” changed drastically during this period. Despite traditional Confucian scholars’ indignant resistance, which can be observed in their numerous petitions to the king, *gaebwa* thought gradually became accepted among intellectuals. Under the hostile global circumstances, Koreans started to recognize the need to learn from the West to raise their national wealth and strength. Recognizing the West as a world of material wealth and physical power, *gaebwa* theorists became very interested in its remarkable achievements in the fields of economy, machinery, technology, and military. These theorists hoped to raise Korea’s wealth and strength by learning the merits of Western systems.21

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21. The “bummei kaika” (civilization and enlightenment) movement in Japan began during the late 1860s and continued to the early 1880s. In this movement, Japanese early modernists including Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901) realized the nation’s weaknesses in the face of Western expansion and argued for rapid modernization modeled after the West. In this respect, Korea’s *gaebwa* and *mumnyeong* discourses were preceded and influenced by Japanese ones. However, the discourses of both countries were not identical. Rather, it might be more appropriate to assume that, in terms of content, the discourses were developed separately in accordance with each country’s historical circumstances. As Yi Wanje points out, Korean *gaebwa* and *mumnyeong* discourses historically appeared out of Koreans’ sense of crisis amidst foreign expansion into Korea. The understanding of *gaebwa*, for instance, differed even within Korea. For instance, Yu Giljun, reflecting the Japanese influence, noted that *gaebwa* is “the process through which various human things and affairs reach the status of ultimate good and beauty.” In comparison, the *Dongnip sinmun* mentioned that the term *gaebwa* originated from China and defined it as a situation in which “one thinks about affairs with reason and does all things in realistic ways by enlightening his/her viewpoints.” As for the term *mumnyeong*, No Daecheon argued that it was originally introduced to Korea by *gaebwa* theorists as a translation of “civilization” and was used interchangeably with *gaebwa* in reference to Western materials and thought in the late nineteenth century. Those terms were often combined as “*mumnyeong gaebwa*.” All translations of Korean sources in this study are the author’s unless noted otherwise. See Yi Wanje, *Chogi gaebwa sasang yeongu* [Research on early *gaebwa* thought], (Seoul: Minjokmunhwasa, 1989); Yu,
The early gaehwa theorists’ aspiration for national strength is well reflected in the Hanseong sunbo (hereafter the Sunbo) and the Hanseong jubó (hereafter the Jubo). These newspapers’ primary concerns are revealed through such concepts as bugang (wealth and strength), buguk gangbyeong (wealthy nation and strong military), and jagang (self-strengthening). This is an extract from a representative article in the Sunbo:

These days, Western countries establish companies to attract merchants, who are actually the basis of wealth and strength (bugang). . . . In Western countries, steamships traverse the sea, freight cars run on the ground, and electric wires are laid and streetlights are turned on, the wonders of which are beyond description. They flaunt their wealth and strength all over the world and impress their neighbors by sending forces to every [corner of the] sea and conducting commerce with all countries, which is unprecedented. This has been possible only since they established companies. (20 November 1883)

This article recognized the importance of companies as the main source of wealth and strength among Western countries; furthermore, it appreciated commercial value and material development. This is a departure from traditional Confucian thought, which pursues spiritual and ethical values at the expense of material wealth. The term bugang is a key word in this article. Things made through engineering and technology, such as steamships, freight cars, and electric wires, are considered indicators of bugang. The West was seen as the agent of bugang, and the key to its power was the establishment of companies, and, in this sense, the wide gap between the West and Korea was recognized.

Another important perceived feature of the West was its military power. The West was regarded as the world-dominating military power, which was based upon the development of machinery, technology, and industry. Thus, material wealth (bu) and military power (gang) were considered closely interrelated. The following is an excerpt from an article of the Sunbo that reveals the perception of Britain’s power:

Mainland Britain is just an island country, but it developed navigation skills early and exerted its ambition around the world, broadening its territories, by taking

22. Jeong, Hanseong sunbo Hanseong jubó, 38.
advantage of machinery. . . . Britain gives top priority to military affairs. It subjugates its vassals by making many warships and completing military preparations, and it always keeps its military at the ready with the ambition of dominating its vassals. . . . The British people display respect for manufacturing industries and produce many machines that make life convenient, and their national wealth and strong military (buguk gangbyeong) is the best in the world. (20 December 1883)

As the accumulation of wealth was considered to be brought about by military power, the West, as the possessor of a great deal of wealth, was not necessarily an ideal world. Rather, Korean newspapers thought that the West led the rise of a new world order, which was rather deplorable due to its militaristic, competitive, and dominating features. In this regard, the Sunbo mentioned that “all countries in the world are now concerned with military affairs and compete with one another to become more powerful.” (29 December 1883) As for the dominance of the West, the Jubo said that among numerous countries in the six populated continents, “only the countries in Europe monopolize wealth and strength, and many countries in the other five continents are in the situation of being subjugated.” (8 March 1886)

The West was mainly perceived as behaving hypocritically and in its own self-interest. Regarding Western countries’ aggressiveness toward others, the Sunbo stated, “the ancients who said that “[Westerners] are not our race and their minds are always different [from ours]’ did not deceive us.” (22 July 1884) In a similar vein, the Jubo said, “one should be very careful when interacting with foreigners.” (4 October 1886) Furthermore, the West was considered to be the main culprit in imposing the law of the jungle and the logic of power on the world. The Jubo, for instance, wrote the following:

People who busily interact with one another only aim at profit, so how can we say that there is no law of the jungle? For example, France first subjugated Vietnam as its tributary, and England subjugated Burma. France and England always claimed treaties and international laws as the golden rule, but they have eventually subjugated others, while insisting on benevolence and righteousness [. . .].

25. Jeong, Hanseong sunbo Hanseong jubo, 748.
27. Jeong, Hanseong sunbo Hanseong jubo, 842.
28. Jeong, Hanseong sunbo Hanseong jubo, 842. The rapacious nature of Western expansion was similarly recognized by modern intellectuals in other Asian countries at the time. The Japanese nationalist journalist Tokutomi Soho (1863–1957), for instance, argued the following in an article
This article mentioned the mistrust of the world order in relation to international treaties. Newspapers pointed out the misuse of international laws and treaties by Western countries, who were typically their chief promoters. The Jubo, for instance, regretted that “the countries are not afraid of ignoring international laws when it comes to self-interest, and do not feel ashamed when annulling treaties.” (8 March 1886) In this respect, Korea encountered a paradoxical situation in which it had to participate in a world that it did not necessarily welcome. Thus, the perception of an environment dominated by naked power played a role in promoting the need for raising Korea’s wealth and strength as an urgent strategy for its survival.

The colonial expansion of the West was justified by some notable social ideologies that originated from the West, such as social Darwinism or social evolutionism. The main argument of Herbert Spencer, an English social theorist and representative social Darwinist, was that “the best forms of social organization emerge with unregulated competition among humans, which allows the most fit to survive, thereby elevating the level of society.” Echoing the logic of natural selection suggested by Darwin, social Darwinism justifies competition and inequality among human societies as the driving force of social evolution. In this logic, the subjugation of weaker societies by the stronger is naturalized as a necessary process for social development. Social Darwinism is closely related to stage theories, as the processes of social evolution were often depicted as a succession of distinct stages, such as primitivism, savagery, barbarism, and civilization. This became a major social ideology that Korean

published in 1886: “The present-day world is one in which civilized people tyrannically destroy primitive people. . . The European countries stand at the very pinnacle of violence and base themselves on the doctrine of force . . . India, alas, has been destroyed, Annam has been destroyed, Burma will be next.” See de Bary et al., Sources of Japanese Tradition, 132.

29. One of the main objectives of the Japanese Iwakura mission in 1872–1873 was to investigate the possibility of renegotiating the unequal treaties made between Japan and Western powers at the time. See Alistair Swale, “America: 15 January – 6 August 1872: The First Stage in the Quest for Enlightenment,” in The Iwakura Mission in America and Europe: A New Assessment, ed. Ian Nish (Surrey: Japan Library, 1998), 7–23.

30. Jeong, Hanseong sunbo Hanseong jubo, 748.


32. Nederveen Pieterse argues that social evolutionism was an imperial vision, which, along with Victorian anthropology and race science, constituted a part of the discourse of the British Empire in the nineteenth century. See Jan Nederveen Pieterse, Development Theory: Deconstructions /
intellectuals and those in other Asian countries adopted as a tool for understanding the competitive world during their early modernization period.  

Given their critical attitudes towards the West-dominated competitive world, however, the opinions reflected in the Sunbo and Jubo did not yet fully approve of social Darwinist ideas. Rather, they showed considerable reservations toward them.

While recognizing the wealth and strength of the West, the newspapers did not necessarily regard the West as superior—the typical assumption in Eurocentric discourses. Rather, they showed a substantial degree of pride in their own history and civilization, and they expressed surprise at the “abrupt” rise of the West. As for the “rise” of Britain, the Sunbo stated, “England was destitute just a short time ago and has a short history, but it has achieved this development. We should research what made it possible.” (20 December 1883)  

Citing a Chinese journal, another article of the Sunbo mentioned that “in ancient times, no country [sic] was more destitute than the West and no country was worse off than the West.” (8 January 1884)  

As such, the newspapers mainly saw the rise of the West as a recent and incidental phenomenon. In comparison, emphasizing Korea’s great natural resources and historical heritage, the Jubo argued that “if we make efforts in developing policies to promote bugang, with these good resources, we should be able to reach most of the six continents, surpassing other nations.” (23 August 1886)

There was no Eurocentric hierarchy between Korea (or the East) and the West during this period. While the West began to be recognized as a civilization (mumnyeong-guk) of commerce and technology, the East was still regarded as a traditional kind of civilization with rich cultural and natural resources. The main reason the Sunbo and the Jubo suggested the need for learning from the West in the 1880s was not because they perceived the West as ideal; rather, it was because they felt a sense of urgency for national survival under hostile international circumstances.


33. Tikhonov argues that social Darwinism was the main ideological base upon which early Korean modern intellectuals built their pursuit of national power and survival, and of “civilization,” the “fittest status.” Tikhonov, Social Darwinism and Nationalism in Korea.

34. Jeong, Hanseong sunbo Hanseong jubô, 97.

35. Jeong, Hanseong sunbo Hanseong jubô, 137.

Eurocentrism in Gaehwa and Mummyeong Discourses: The Dongnip sinmun (1896–1899) and the Daehan maeil sinbo (1904–1910)

The Dongnip sinmun (1896–1899)

With regard to Korea’s and other East Asian countries’ responses to the West in the nineteenth century, three temporal phases can generally be distinguished: hostility, limited acceptance, and total acceptance. While traditional Confucian scholars’ attitude towards the West was one of hostility, the attitudes of the Sunbo and Jubo showed a limited acceptance, recognizing Western power albeit with great caution. However, when it came to the Dongnip sinmun (hereafter the Sinmun), Korean modern thinkers began to show a less critical attitude, basically accepting Eurocentric ideas and the world order they promoted. With regard to the national self, the Sinmun writers frequently observed Korea from a “civilized man’s” perspective by internalizing the values of the West. In this respect, the Sinmun can be considered a harbinger of a period of total acceptance. As Gil Jinsook noted, “during the period of the Dongnip sinmun, mummyeong became coterminous with ‘Western civilization’ . . . .”

Ways for modeling gaehwa and mummyeong after the West were actively discussed after the Gabo Reform (1894–1896), and the Sinmun and the Mael sinmun were the main publications that promoted the use of those concepts for the general public. Among such terms as gaehwa, mummyeong, and jinbo (progress), which advocated the need for learning from the West in those times, the most popular one in the Sinmun was gaehwa. In fact, the concept of gaehwa at the time was so popular that people felt they had heard it to the


40. No, “1890-nyeondae huban munnmyeong gaenyeom ui hwaksan.”

41. No Daehwan (in “1890-nyeondae huban munnmyeong gaenyeom ui hwaksan”) notes that the most frequently used concept in the Mael sinmun was munnmyeong as in bugang munnmyeong (strength and civilization) and munnmyeong bugang (civilization and strength).
point that “their ears were worn out.”

In the Sinmun, a distinct hierarchy between the West and the East was implied, and gaehwa was the most dominant criterion to make the distinction. One article of the Sinmun classified countries of the world into four hierarchical categories according to the degree of gaehwa, such as gaehwa (enlightened), ban-gaehwa (half-enlightened), mi-gaehwa (unenlightened), and yaman (barbarian). Unlike the previous period when Korea was mainly perceived as another civilized country with a long history and valuable cultural heritage, the Sinmun generally viewed it as ban-gaehwa and suggested drastic self-strengthening reforms modeled after the West. In the classificatory systems of gaehwa discourse, only the West was categorized as gaehwa. As such, the idea of gaehwa adopted a Eurocentric civilizational view of history (mumuyeong sagwan), which assumed that human history was one of civilizational progress led by the West. Consequently, the West was represented by various terms implying the highest stage of civilization, such as gaehwa-guk (enlightened country), mumuyeong-guk (civilized country), mumuyeong-gaehwa-guk (civilized enlightened country), sangdeung-guk (upper-class country), or ildeung-guk (first-class country).

Furthermore, Western knowledge and ideas were somewhat uncritically accepted. Colonial and racial ideas, which argued for the superiority of the West, spread in Korea under the name of “science.” One editorial introduced a study on Western dietary life in the following way:

According to the analysis of various grains by Western chemists, wheat flour is the best for the human body, corn is the next, and rice has the least nutrients. We can

42. Dongnip sinmun, “Nonseol” [Editorial], November 2, 1899, 1.
43. The term sugu (“reactionary”) was often used as the opposite of gaehwa. One editorial reported a person saying, “when talking about rural people’s living, one may not know whether it is gaehwa or sugu […].” Dongnip sinmun, “Nonseol” [Editorial], November 2, 1899, 1.
45. In relation to this, some Protestant reformers in the Dongnip sinmun, such as Seo Jaepil and Yun Chiho, combined their religious faith with nationalism and regarded Korea’s material weaknesses as “symptoms of moral and spiritual decline.” They reinterpreted “self-strengthening” as “the religious and ethical renewal of individual and society” based upon Christian faith. See Kenneth M. Wells, New God, New Nation: Protestants and Self-Reconstruction Nationalism in Korea 1896–1937 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 9.
47. With regard to racial studies, for instance, one editorial said, “in foreign countries, a study called ethnology is a great study and people studying ethnology are very respected.” Dongnip sinmun, “Nonseol” [Editorial], April 6, 1897, 1.
easily perceive which one is superior and which one inferior by witnessing the robustness of Westerners, who eat wheat flour, and the weakness of Easterners, who eat rice.\textsuperscript{48}

Another editorial argued for the superiority of Western and Japanese customs over those of China:

Koreans always say that it is strange that Western women make their waist thin, that Japanese women paint their teeth, and that Chinese (Qing) women bind their feet. If we consider the merits and demerits of these in terms of people’s lives, painted teeth and thin waistlines are not harmful for working, but the custom of binding feet not only obstructs work but also is harmful for health . . . \textsuperscript{49}

The content of this article reflects the decline of China in relation to the West and Japan. Consequently, various customs of Eastern civilization were considered old-fashioned and irrational when compared to those of the West. In this epistemic hierarchy, intervention by a supposed rational being into an irrational being’s affairs was justified. The article added that “it is truly wonderful that Western women try to establish jeonjokhoe [foot-binding clubs] these days to change the bad custom of China’s foot-binding.”\textsuperscript{50} Furthermore, another article explicitly reflected a colonial perspective regarding the British colonization of India:

After England first conquered India, they lamented people’s ignorance there and decided to educate them with new studies by spending 40,000 ryang of silver annually. . . . It is commendable that new studies are greatly promoted in India . . . \textsuperscript{51}

This kind of perception, however, did not mean that the Sinmun was completely free from anxiety over Western expansion. Some editorials explicitly demonstrated their uneasiness about the aggressive behavior of the West. One editorial noted that “generally, Westerners aim to get rid of different religions and dominate other races,” adding, “[t]hey try to look down upon [the rest of] the world by

\textsuperscript{48} Dongnip sinmun, “Guhwanghal gyecha” [The strategies of famine relief], August 25, 1898, 1.
\textsuperscript{49} Dongnip sinmun, “Nonseol” [Editorial], October 14, 1899, 1.
\textsuperscript{50} Dongnip sinmun, “Nonseol,” October 14, 1899.
\textsuperscript{51} Dongnip sinmun, “Nonseol” [Editorial], September 20, 1899, 1. Tikhonov noted that the Dongnip sinmun generally adopted social Darwinist ideas and, thus, thought that “misfortunes were partly caused by the racial inferiority of the non-Western victims of ‘civilization and progress.’” See Tikhonov, Social Darwinism and Nationalism in Korea, 60.
elevating themselves to a high position.”

The Daehan maeil sinbo (1904–1910)

In the 1900s, the rivalries among Western countries intensified in their pursuit of new colonies. Despite the growing plurality in the world economy, the gap between the colonial West and the colonized non-West remained significant. Amidst intensifying colonial rivalries foreshadowing World War I, the term “imperialism” was on everybody’s lips in the West. In Asia, Japan was the only country that competed with the West in the colonial race. While the epistemic hierarchy between the West and the East was manifest, Japan came to be treated as somewhat equal to the “civilized” West with its victories over China (1895) and Russia (1905). In the Korean Peninsula, Japan’s intention of colonizing Korea became manifest, which resulted in the Eulsa treaty of 1905 that deprived Korea of diplomatic rights. In 1910, Japan “officially” colonized Korea under the legal discourse of international law created and enforced by “civilized” countries. In other words, Korea was declared illegal by the “civilized” world and fell prey to the discourse of “enlightened exploitation.”

Korea’s deplorable situation under these harsh international circumstances was recognized by the Daehan maeil sinbo [hereafter the Sinbo], and the need for learning from the West was urgently advocated as a result. A cause for

52. Dongnip sinmun, “Nonseol” [Editorial], November 9, 1899, 1.
53. Hobshawm, The Age of Empire.
54. Hobshawm, The Age of Empire, 60.
55. Shortly after Japan’s victory over China, Tokutomi Soho (1863–1957), an influential Japanese modern journalist, rejoiced at Japan’s supposedly elevated status in the West-led world: “We are no longer ashamed to stand before the world as Japanese . . . . The name ‘Japanese’ . . . now signifies honor, glory, courage, triumph, and victory. Before we did not know ourselves, and the world did not yet know us. But now that we have tested our strength, we know ourselves and we are known by the world. Moreover, we know that we are known by the world!” See de Bary et al., Sources of Japanese Tradition, 133. Tanaka stated that “the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95) gained Japan respect as a power in Asia, while the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5) was seen to signal Japan’s entry into the elite group of major world powers.” See Stefan Tanaka, Japan’s Orient: Rendering Pasts into History (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 14–5.
56. Alexis Dudden, Japan’s Colonization of Korea: Discourse and Power (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005).
57. Another representative newspaper in this period was the Hwangseong sinmun, which was published by pro-reform Confucian intellectuals. Despite the difference between this and the Sinbo in the general tone of argument, both of them agreed on the need for reform promoting mummyeong as a strategy for national survival. Noh noted that the Hwangseong Sinmun frequently used the term “gaemyeong” (enlightenment) for reform and the acceptance of Western knowledge. Back also stated that the Hwangseong sinmun “distinguished between mummyeong-
Korea’s efforts to gain strength was sought from its brilliant past. The *Sinbo* often contrasted Korea’s past glories with its current miserable situation:

Alas! O Korea, why have you alone met such bad luck? With such a miserable appearance, you are not like England that has broad territories around the world, not like Germany that sheds the bright light of studies, and not like the U.S. that boasts great wealth. . . . You also produced heroes, were wealthy and strong, and were civilized in the past; thus, when China and India shone, you also rose with them. When such countries as Japan did not have the name of nation at the beginning, you already showed the development of culture. Alas, are you not considered a brother to China and India, and a senior to Japan? Then, how could you lose the past honor and meet this tragic bad luck today?

In comparison with the West and Korea’s own past, many aspects of contemporary Korea were easily subject to harsh self-criticism and auto-Orientalism, into which Koreans’ severe feelings of frustration were projected. One article wrote, “whether in the past or the present, whether in the East or the West, no public officials have been more negligent in doing their duties than those in Korea today, and no other ordinary people are as unenlightened as those in Korea today.” In addition to its own deplorable image, Korea was also faced with the ideal image of the West. Another article argued that in the West “hope for humanity is unlimited and human progress is also unlimited . . .”

Learning from the West was considered the only way out of this frustrating situation. Thus, the term *gaehwa* was still popular and influential in this context. According to one article, “the reason why our country today is in this pitiful situation is not because people do not have power but because we thought of *gaehwa* too late . . .” However, the frequency of its use was greatly reduced with the increasing popularity of the term *mumnyeong*. The magazine

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59. *Daehan maeil sinbo*, “Nonseol” [Editorial], October 6, 1908, 1.
60. *Daehan maeil sinbo*, “Nonseol” [Editorial], August 13, 1908, 1.
62. The number of articles containing the term *gaehwa* was 16 for the *Dongnip sinmun* and 13
Gaebyeok, which was published in the 1920s, mentioned that the term gaehwa became popular with the public after 1894, and it was only after 1904 that the term mummyeong was popularized. Thus, the 1900s seemed to be the period when the key concept employed in advocating the need for reform shifted from gaehwa to mummyeong. With the increasing tendency to idealize the West, mummyeong was virtually coterminous with Western civilization and its universality was rarely doubted during this period.

During Japan’s colonization of Korea, the secret of Japan’s wealth and strength was sought from its “successful” accommodation of the West. Although the writers at the Sinbo recognized the gaehwa or mummyeong status of Japan, they did not lose their historical and cultural sense of superiority over Japan. Showing confidence in Korea’s potential, the Sinbo argued that Japan’s advance over Korea was temporary and merely a matter of learning from the West. As such, the mummyeong discourse was used in more complicated contexts than is usually assumed in the simplistic binary distinction between superior mummyeong and inferior non-mummyeong or half-mummyeong.

An important social role of the sense of superiority over Japan was to promote resistance to Japanese colonialism. While Japan tried to justify its colonial rule with the discourse of mummyeong – for example, under the cause of “civilizing” Korea – Korea responded to it with a different focus on gaehwa or mummyeong that of the past. One article of the Sinbo argued the following:

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64. In this regard, Korean nationalists’ efforts for mummyeong gaehwa are sometimes interpreted as mainly aiming at participating in the “global trend.” Schmid, Korea Between Empires.

65. In this regard, Tokutomi Soho, for instance, argued in 1896 that, “We have a duty to radiate the light of civilization beyond our shores and bring the benefits of civilization to our neighbors. We have the duty to guide backward countries to the point of being able to govern themselves.” See de Bary et al., Sources of Japanese Tradition, 133.

66. This tendency becomes clearer in the period of Japanese colonial rule. As is shown below, there are many cases in which Koreans discursively attack the Japanese rule and its civilization discourse with the discourse of mummyeong in different contexts. This disputes Schmid’s argument that Korean nationalists witnessed “how mummyeong kaehwa was used [by the Japanese] to undermine their national sovereignty . . .” and moved to contemplate alternative nationalist discourses such as “the national soul (kukhon) or the national essence (kuksa).” Schmid’s argument largely derived from his assumption of the singular form of the discourse of mummyeong gaehwa, which ignored Koreans’ active constructions of the discourse reflecting their own senses of national and global circumstances. See Schmid, Korea Between Empires, 15, 38, and ch. 4.
In the past, Japan was a country that learned gaehwa from Korea. Its Shintoism was created on the basis of things from the Silla kingdom, its Confucianism and Buddhism were imported from the Baekje kingdom, and engineering and arts were all learned from Korea. So, no matter how powerful Japan is today, the Koreans will be willing to fight against it, but they do not have any intention to surrender, and thus will not tolerate colonization.  

The Crisis and Reconstruction of Munnyeong Discourse: The Chosun ilbo and the Dong-a ilbo (1920s-1930s)

The Crisis of the Munnyeong Discourse

As for the transformation of the discourse about munnyeong in the late 1900s, No Daehwan noted a tendency to distinguish between spiritual and material civilizations. The bifurcation of the concept of munnyeong implied that Koreans recognized the possibility of the existence of other types of munnyeong that did not necessarily belong to the West. While appreciating the strength of the West as a material civilization, some intellectuals emphasized the importance of spiritual aspects. This meant that the Eurocentric perception of civilization was undermined and the authority of Western civilization shrank because it was designated as one type of civilization, that is, material civilization. This new intellectual tendency which started in the late 1900s became manifest in the 1920s.

Just after World War I, the early 1920s witnessed a drastic reduction in the authority of Western civilization. The belief in the linear progress of history pioneered by Western civilization came under serious scrutiny in the wake of the unprecedented level of tragedies and atrocities committed by the so-called munnyeong-guk in their world war. As Nederveen Pieterse noted, “[c]yclical theories of history of a pessimistic cast prevailed, in the imagery of rise, decline and fall” after world wars.

Amidst the decline of the authority of Western civilization, Koreans also questioned its universality and desirability. Departing from the previous

68. No, “1905–1910-nyeon munnyeongnon ui jeongae.”
71. Many Asian intellectuals changed their perceptions of the West after World War I. The influential Chinese modernist Liang Qichao (1873–1929), for instance, who had been an ardent admirer of the West on the basis of social Darwinist ideas, dramatically altered his attitude after
idealization of the West, newspapers often described the West as a world of uncertainty and confusion. Under the title “The new tendency of Western civilization after the world war,” the Chosun ilbo [Joseon ilbo; hereafter the Chosun] mentioned that “recently, Europe is a world of transition and confusion,” adding, “[t]his transition and confusion is a unique phenomenon to Western countries after the big war.” 72 Korean newspapers also developed relative perspectives on mummyeong and began to recognize the values of various civilizations in different regions. In this regard, they raised basic questions about mummyeong, such as “What is mummyeong?” and “What is yaman?” An opinion column of the Chosun argued that “it is clear that a people who ignore humanity with a mere belief in power are yaman, and that a people who love peace and respect for justice are mummyeong.” 73 According to this criterion, the West was not necessarily a world of mummyeong. Accordingly, an article in the Chosun harshly criticized the pursuit of power by the West:

If a Western scholar argues that psychology, politics, institutions, and economy are the elements of civilization, and exaggerates that they themselves are the civilized people, this is a bias of provincial pride and racial arrogance. . . . When we look into their psychology, what lofty ideals do they have, individually or nationally, except for invasion, plunder, misconduct, and pillage? . . . If we call them mummyeong-in [civilized people], this is not different from calling a thief a gunja [a man of virtue]. 74

Thus, the column concludes that a peace-loving civilization such as Korea’s is a true mummyeong.

The West was repositioned as merely a region (e.g., that of confusion and transition), instead of the world. The Dong-a ilbo [hereafter the Dong-a] disputed the British media’s argument that the Imperial Conference of Britain was an institution for world peace.

The first Imperial Conference of Britain after the world war was held in London returning from Europe. He had observed the tragedies of the world war and saw the West as “sick and declining, the victim of its own obsession with science, materialism, and mechanization.” See Wm. Theodore de Bary and Richard Lufrano, eds., Sources of Chinese Tradition, vol. 2, 2nd edn. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 377–9.

72. Chosun ilbo, “Daejeon hu ui guju mummyeong ui singyeonghyang” [The new trend of European civilization after the war], April 30, 1921, 1.
73. Chosun ilbo, “Mummyeong gwa yaman” [Civilization and barbarism], June 20, 1921, 1.
74. Chosun ilbo, “Mummyeong gwa yaman.”
The British media designate it as “an institution of world peace” and compare it to the League of Nations. We are to comment on this interesting matter. As merely a meeting of Britain, the Conference discusses its national interests, that is, national defense, foreign policy, and the relationships between main land and its tributaries. Then, why do they call it an institution of world peace?

The Reconstruction of Munmyeong Discourse

Munmyeong in the 1920s came to connote a society’s degree of artificial achievement, which was distinguishable from the state of nature. As the concept of munmyeong took on diversity and specificity, various kinds of civilizations were recognized, such as “spiritual civilization,” “material civilization,” “civilization of science,” “civilization of peace,” “civilization of ethics,” “civilization of invasion,” “civilization of the East,” “civilization of the West,” and so forth. The concept of munmyeong was no longer monopolized by the West. Rather, Western munmyeong, as one of the various forms of munmyeong, was often regarded as materially developed but lacking spiritual and harmonious aspects.

The Eurocentric hierarchy collapsed in the munmyeong discourse. There was no ideal image of Western civilization at the expense of others. Rather, Western civilization (seoyang munmyeong) was regarded merely as a regional civilization with distinguishable characteristics, and so was Eastern civilization (dongyang munmyeong). The Chosun referred to Eastern civilization as dodeok munmyeong (civilization of ethics) and Western civilization as gwahak munmyeong (civilization of science). The aforementioned article provided a relativist perspective on these civilizations.

If we would like to discuss the values of human civilization by the situations of the East and the West, they [the West] may see us lacking material development, but may not be able to say that our ethics vanished too. Similarly, when seeing them, we may not be able to say that their scientific civilization is not developed just because they are weak in ethics.

75. Dong-a ilbo, “Munmyeongin gwa yamanin ui chae” [The difference between the civilized and the barbarian], June 27, 1921, 3.
76. Dong-a ilbo, “Munmyeong ui wonjil” [The nature of civilization], September 15, 1925, 1.
77. Chosun ilbo, “Gwahak munmyeong gwa dodeok munmyeong ui gachi wa sojang” [The values, and rises and falls of the civilization of science and the civilization of virtuel], July 26, 1921, 1.
78. Chosun ilbo, “Gwahak munmyeong gwa dodeok munmyeong ui gachi wa sojang.”
Similarly, it mentioned the need for combining the merits of the two civilizations.

Therefore, as Eastern civilization has so long maintained the center thanks to its ethics, it would enjoy permanent peace by combining with the Western civilization of science, and, at the same time, they [the West] may not be able to ignore the value of this kind of exchange either.  

Consequently, Korean newspapers tended to consider munmyeong in terms of peace and humanity. The values of certain regional munmyeong were judged by the degree of their contribution to making universal munmyeong promoting humanity. As a product of human efforts, munmyeong was considered “advancing human behavior from bestiality to humanization.” Judging by this concept of munmyeong, Western civilization was frequently regarded as lacking in spiritual virtue.

Koreans discredited the West and challenged the Eurocentric notion of munmyeong as a reflection of their feelings of victimization inflicted by a country claiming to be munmyeong-guk. In this sense, the re-conceptualizations of munmyeong and yaman were related to the resistance to the colonial occupation of Korea. The newspapers designated a civilization promoting the logic of power as pseudo-munmyeong or yaman, and peace-loving civilization as true munmyeong. This way of conceptualizing munmyeong and yaman provided justification to Koreans’ resistance to Japan’s colonial rule. In this regard, the Chosun reported a speech from Yi Sangje, then president of the Chosun ilbo, under the title “Rise, youth of Korea, perverted by the civilization of invasion:”

The president of this newspaper, Yi Sangje, slowly approached the podium to speak on the topic of “the responsibility of the youth;” he urged the youth of Korea, perverted by the so-called modern violent science and the civilization of invasion, to stand up. He said that in order to save the world, Korea’s youth should rise faster than those in any other country infiltrated by money and perverted science, to conquer the world of evil with the great power of true love

The new concept of munmyeong became the ground upon which Koreans

79. Chosun ilbo, “Gwahak munmyeong gwa dodeok munmyeong ui gachi wa sojang.”
80. Dong-a ilbo, “Munmyeong ui wonjil.”
81. Chosun ilbo, “Chimnyak munmyeong e yurin doen Joseon cheongnyeon a, gweolghihara. Bonbo sajang Yi Sangje-si gangyeyon” [Rise, the youth of Korea, perverted by the civilization of invasion: Address by the president of our newspaper, Yi Sangje], November 13, 1925, 1.
criticized colonial rule and revealed its unjustness. Under the criteria for this 
mummyeong, Japan’s oppressive colonial rule frequently fell into the category of 
yaman. The newspapers often pointed out that Japan’s rule contradicted their 
own claims to mummyeong-guk. As for the Japanese police’s use of torture, the 
Chosun argued that “no torture exists under the judicial systems and police of a 
civilized (mummyeong) [nation].”\textsuperscript{82} In another article, the newspaper raised the 
need for “civilizing the police.”\textsuperscript{83}

On the other hand, despite the drastic changes in the connotation of the 
discourse of mummyeong in this period, the authority of “science” did not wane 
significantly. The discourse’s binary distinction between mummyeong and 
yaman was often supported by a variety of “scientific” forms of knowledge 
generated from the West.\textsuperscript{84} Citing the study of an American geneticist, the 
Dong-a reported that the more people are civilized, the higher their noses are.\textsuperscript{85} 
Other articles introduced similar kinds of racial propositions in relation to 
mummyeong. For instance, civilized people have no wisdom teeth as a result of 
evolution (an English scholar’s finding);\textsuperscript{86} civilized people have round-type faces 
(an American dental scholar’s finding);\textsuperscript{87} and civilized people talk fast (an 
English stenographer’s finding).\textsuperscript{88}

Conclusion

This study examined the connotations of gaehwa and mummyeong discourses 
and discovered that they did not imply simple binary hierarchical distinctions as 
previously thought. The ways Koreans’ perceptions of national self and the 
West are reflected in those discourses vary from period to period, reflecting 
different national and international circumstances.

\textsuperscript{82} Chosun ilbo, “Mummyeonghan sabeop gwa gyeongchal edo gomun i muhan ira” [There is no 
torture in civilized judicial and police systems], March 9, 1923, 1.

\textsuperscript{83} Chosun ilbo, “Gyeongchal eul mummyeonghwa hara” [Civilize the police], July 12, 1924, 1.

\textsuperscript{84} It is interesting to note that many “scientific” findings become nonsense from today’s 
perspective.

\textsuperscript{85} Dong-a ilbo, “Yeongung gwa ko, mummyeongin ilsurok koga keugo nopda” [The hero and 
nose: the more civilized, the higher and bigger their noses], July 16, 1926, 3.

\textsuperscript{86} Dong-a ilbo, “Mummyeongin ege neun sarangni ga eoppta” [Civilized people have no wisdom 
teeth], June 26, 1929, 3.

\textsuperscript{87} Dong-a ilbo, “Mummyeonghan saram eun eolgul i dunggeuleojyeo” [Civilized people have 
round-type faces], February 11, 1939, 4.

\textsuperscript{88} Dong-a ilbo, “Mummyeongindeul eun ip i ppareuda” [Civilized people talk fast], August 8, 
1936, 3.
In the 1880s, Korea began to recognize the power of the West and the harsh reality of the world order. Departing from the traditional disregard of the West, the Hanseong sunbo and the Hanseong jubó argued for learning the merits of Western social systems in order to raise national wealth and strength. However, their perceptions of the West were not necessarily Eurocentric. The West was frequently recognized as self-interested, belligerent, and untrustworthy. Furthermore, the “rise of the West” was considered a recent and incidental phenomenon; thus, it could be outrun by Korea and the East with appropriate effort, which supposedly was possible due to the East’s better historical, cultural, and natural conditions. Korea and the East were still considered the possessors of better ethics and cultural heritage, while the West was perceived mainly as the promoter of technology and industry. Thus, in those newspapers in the 1880s, there was no apparent Eurocentric hierarchy between Korea and the West.

When it came to the Dongnip sinmun and the Daehan maeil sinbo, a hierarchy between the West and the East became manifest. In this period, the West was typically represented as a world of gaehwa or mummyeong, while the East including Korea and China was ban-gaehwa or ban-mummyeong. The 1890s and 1900s spanned a critical period when the Eurocentric hierarchy between Korea and the West was popularized. Learning from the West was promoted as the only way to make the nation strong enough to sustain national sovereignty. The most popular concepts that reflected the need for learning from the West were gaehwa in the 1890s and mummyeong in the 1900s. The West was explicitly regarded as being at the highest stage of human progress and its civilization as universal, and it was thought that it should be adopted by non-Western societies. In this respect, there were notable Eurocentric attitudes in contemporary Korean intellectuals’ perceptions of national self and the West during this period. Despite its supposed second-tier status in the discourses of gaehwa and mummyeong, however, Korea was still regarded as a country that had a brilliant historical and cultural heritage and exceptional natural conditions. Thus, the Eurocentric hierarchy was still not considered as inherent and permanent; rather, it was incidental, temporary, and thus reversible, which

89. During the gaehwa period, the concept of Korean ethics (“yulli”) was influenced by the Western concept of ethics that was regarded as an element of civilization. However, Koreans’ concept of yulli was rooted in traditional neo-Confucian values and, thus, its connotation and the context of its use were somewhat different from those of the West. Koreans’ intellectuals frequently sought for their pride in Korea from yulli, which they regarded as superior than those of other countries. See Yi Hye Gyung, “Changes in the Concept of Yulli during the Enlightenment Period in Korea,” Seoul Journal of Korean Studies 24, no. 2 (2011): 219-239.
was a notable difference between Korean notions of Eurocentrism and ordinary Eurocentric ideas.

The 1920s and 1930s spanned a period when the universality of Western civilization was highly suspect. In the wake of the unprecedented tragedies of World War I, which was fought by the so-called *mumnyeong-guk*, the authority of the West and Western civilization became weakened. As reflected in the *Chosun ilbo* and the *Dong-a ilbo*, the concept of *mumnyeong* was considered from a relativist perspective, and the values of various civilizations were also recognized. Western civilization was perceived as a material civilization, while Eastern civilization was considered to be spiritual and ethical. This new concept of *mumnyeong* was utilized to criticize Japanese colonial rule. In this regard, peace-loving civilizations such as Korea’s were often considered as “true” *mumnyeong* in contrast with pseudo-*mumnyeong* promoting the logic of power.

In summary, this study argues that it was not until the 1890s that an epistemic hierarchy between Korea and the West became manifest in the discourses of *gaehwa* and *mumnyeong*. The Eurocentric features of the discourses were relatively clear in the 1890s and 1900s, but they became indistinct in the 1920s in the wake of World War I.