

INTELLECTUALS AND POWER: THE CHANGING PORTRAIT OF UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS IN SOUTH KOREA

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For decades after 1945 in Korea, the university has been a center of the intellectual community. Professors had been highly respected for their knowledge and moral spirit against various injustices of authoritarian regimes. University professors are more trusted than any other professionals. In this sense, university professors have long enjoyed high social respect and have been an essential group of power elites who are ready to be involved in central politics. However, they have been confronted with many challenges from inside and outside academia by the eruption of the foreign debt crisis that occurred at the end of 1997. University professors became the main target of social blame and reproach for neglecting to warn of economic disaster, political decay, and social corruption. In fact, the challenge is nothing new to Korean professors, considering the crisis of research universities in foreign countries, especially in the United States. This paper describes the decline of the social status of university professors and various challenges they face in the wave of government strategic move to new intellectuals and the massification of intellectuals in the emerging knowledge-based economy.

THE UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR IN KOREA

A few years ago, returning to Korea after an international conference in the United States, I had a chance to talk with a gentleman who sat beside me on the plane. He was the CEO of small but prosperous company in Wisconsin, the United States. Our conversation touched on various topics, including university professors, because he was interested in the book that I was reading during the flight. He was curious about my job as a university professor in South Korea, displaying his evaluation of the university professor in the United States as definitely a second-class citizen. He stressed, "a university professor is a second-class citizen in terms of annual income and social status except for a handful of distinguished scholars."¹ What, then, he wanted to know, was the Korean story? I hesitated a bit to find a proper

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¹It might be his prejudice.

answer. "Well," I said, "they are first-class citizens in terms of social status but second-class in terms of annual income." He nodded slightly but was curious as to why I became a university professor after he learned that I received the Ph.D. degree in his country. I could not make myself understood clearly because I did not even know why I became a university professor. Was it the occupation I wanted most? Probably not.

No one denies that there are many promising occupations that university graduates, especially of a few top universities, can achieve. But, in Korea under authoritarian rule, university professorship was an attractive occupation for talented students in many aspects. University professors enjoyed relative freedom of speech in terms of social and political critiques under authoritarian rules, and could devote themselves to improving public goods and social justice. University professors were highly respected in spite of their moderate standard of living. A moderate lifestyle since the Yi Dynasty remains an essential virtue for scholars in industrial Korea.² A more plausible explanation of why excellent students, especially of humanities and social sciences, selected university professorship as their life-long career in Korea is a bit ideological under authoritarian rules. Elite students in prestigious universities tended to think that to take jobs in private companies and other sectors was a kind of betrayal to what they had learned and fought against while at the university. Although there were many opportunities to get promising jobs in Chaebol firms, professors seemed to be more attractive and closer to the social and political missions of the generation for the achievement of democratic society.

For decades after the Korean liberation in 1945, the university has been a center of the intellectual community and professors have been respected for their knowledge and moral spirit against the various injustices that authoritarian leaders had committed. Professors enjoy easy access to journalism and other public communication when they wish to express their opinions on national and local affairs. Journalists prefer university professors as their commentators on specific topics to other experts in private companies and research institutions. It is not surprising to find a mode of thinking in Korean society that university professors are more trustful than other professionals, and that people want to listen to professors' opinions on specific topics. Thus, one can easily find professors' names in newspaper articles and watch them on television news when the events or incidents are shocking. This is due to high educational aspirations — professors are regarded as the very incarnation of their hope. People do not doubt that professors are

²Honest poverty was the most cherishing virtue for scholars at that time.

possessed with moral values as well as deep knowledge of specific areas. Such an atmosphere is peculiar to East Asian countries like Korea. University professors in Korea are experts in their study fields as well as leading evaluators and opinion leaders on national and local affairs. Professors who showed outstanding performance in social and political criticism had been frequently selected by authoritarian leaders as cabinet members or members of presidential advisory groups in the Blue House. Political involvement of university professors became more diversified during the democratic period after 1987, as democratic government opened the door of recruitment to persons with new, able and fresh images. In this sense, university professors have occupied a central place in the intellectual community and have long been an essential group of power elites who are ready to be involved in the central politics in Korea.

TWO CULTURES OF INTELLECTUALS

There are two cultures of intellectuals in Korea. One is the traditional culture that dates back to the Yi Dynasty, when scholars applied Confucian philosophy as a principle of social and political order in feudal society. Scholars occupied the top echelon of the status hierarchy that was composed of four strata: scholars (Sa), peasants (Nong), manufacturers (Kong), and merchants (Sang). Sa (士) refers to scholars who cultivate themselves with Confucian philosophy and classics written by Chinese sages. Scholars in the Yi Dynasty were the ruling class, and were responsible for maintaining social and political order in accordance with Confucian lessons. They were divided into two groups. One group actively participated in politics in pursuit of political power. The feudal King selected prominent scholars as powerful and influential bureaucrats. The other was a group of scholars detached from central and local politics because of failure in promotion or sometimes because they were deported due to serious mistakes or rebellious conspiracy against the King. These scholars produced numerous and memorable writings on governing principles of society and politics. Although both groups were quite different in their careers, they shared a common belief that scholars were responsible for cultivating and establishing ethics and morals, which were the prerequisites for a legitimate and just social order. That is, scholars were intellectuals in pursuit of the spirit of *Seonbi* (real scholar), as well as ruling politicians practicing Confucian ethics for the common people. The culture of *Seonbi* is still influential in the modern University and, thus, it is an important component of what professors in the modern period should cherish and cultivate (Chung, 1997; Chun, 1998).

The other culture is a relatively recent one that became prominent during the authoritarian period, but can also be traced back to the nationalist movement during the Japanese occupation. It is the revolutionary culture in pursuit of liberation from Japanese imperialism in the earlier years, and, later, freedom and autonomy from authoritarian and dependent capitalism. Whereas the former culture of *Seonbi* pursued the role of philosopher and pure thinkers as scholarly ideals, the latter posed revolutionary practice as an ultimate goal of intellectuals. In this sense, the latter culture is closer to the intelligentsia in the Russian revolution. In fact, the first generation of Korean intelligentsia were born in the mid-1920s, when radical intellectuals composed of writers, journalists, and college graduates returning from Japan and China after a few years of study initiated the nationalist or socialist movements against Japanese imperialism. They constructed a foundation of nationalist and socialist movements under Japanese colonialism and inspired the spirit of intelligentsia for the next generation. Such a tradition of intelligentsia was revived in quite timely fashion during the April 19th student revolution that eventually overthrew Syngman Rhee's dictatorship in 1960 (Lim, 1999).

The two cultures of intellectuals coexisted without serious conflict throughout the decades of authoritarian rules from 1961 to 1987. University professors of humanities and social sciences fell into three different groups during these years. The first group attempted to keep the spirit of *Seonbi*, confining its activities to academic research and writing without political engagement. Professors of humanities such as literature, history, and philosophy were the primary members of the first group. Journals and academic magazines were the main instrument for them to express and publish their voices on social and political affairs.³ Authoritarian governments tolerated their writings and publications if they were not so radical as to agitate student activists and public resistance. So far as their writings did not violate the National Security Law and irritate the dictatorship, intellectual activities were allowed a limited freedom.

On the other hand, professors of social sciences were more likely to be involved in politics in various ways. Professors of social sciences tended to internalize the participatory image of *Seonbi* more so than those of humanities, mainly because policy makers and politicians borrowed their practical and scientific knowledge in designing policies. Thus the authoritarian leadership selected and appointed prominent social scientists to high positions

³Academic magazine and periodicals are useful means for intellectuals to express their opinions in Korea and Japan.

in the cabinet and frequently to the presidential advisory committee. Once a professor was selected into politics and bureaucracy, he would leave academia permanently. No professors successfully returned to academia after a few years of service under the dictatorship.⁴ Above all, professors who served the authoritarian leaders as higher bureaucrats or statesmen were labeled as traitors to the academic and democratic causes. Nevertheless, numerous professors left academia and the intellectual community for politics, voluntarily or forcibly. A few achieved brilliant success, but many failed to survive in politics (Lim, 1999).

The third group consisted of intelligentsia with revolutionary aspirations. Even though they were fewer in number, their voice and practice were far more influential than other groups of professors throughout the authoritarian period. Some had to weather severe repression from the government, and many of them spent a few years in prison in charge of violation of the national Security Laws and Presidential Emergency Decrees. They were the avant-garde of political resistance for democracy in the dark years, actively engaging in labor and student movements as spiritual and ideological supporters. It is interesting to observe that some of the intelligentsia professors in that period were selected by civilian presidents and became politicians in the democratic era of the 1990s. However, most of them remained in academia as a main force of critique on globalization and neo-liberalism. They attempted to elaborate and advocate the progressive and radical vision since the demise of socialist countries in the early 1990s. They are labeled as the 'intellectual left' in Korea, and tried to create a balance with the more strongly preferred right.

WHY "NEW INTELLECTUAL"?

The foreign debt crisis of December 1997 and the following IMF intervention forced the intellectual community to reflect on the role and ability of university professors to diagnose state affairs and provide policy remedies for various symptoms of economic crisis. Prior to the foreign debt crisis, some economists and social scientists predicted the possible advent of economic crisis due to the sudden bankruptcy of a few large companies and its shock on financial sectors. But politicians and bureaucrats were not convinced by the prediction. They all had a vague notion about the economic recession of that time, but without proper policy remedies in preparation for

⁴The rule changed during the democratic period. Many of them successfully returned to academia.

a sudden breakdown of foreign exchange systems. If someone in academia had tried to convince politicians and bureaucrats of the problem and to warn them of the drainage of foreign currency holdings, they would not have listened to the warning, since an affirmative response to it would inflict serious damage on the presidential election that was going to be held in December 1997. Anyhow, the foreign debt crisis actually occurred and the destiny of the nation was handed over to the IMF.⁵ The event meant the inability of state managers as well as the total failure of Korean social sciences. Many intellectuals regrettably confessed the death of Korean social sciences and demanded fundamental reconsideration of what they had neglected and missed. Academia kept silence for a while in the midst of the foreign debt crisis, the resolution of which was already taken by the IMF. Academies were confronted with many agonizing questions from ordinary people about those experts who had eloquently exhibited their knowledge in explaining the economic and political affairs in the mass media, while the entire nation was slipping into deep distress. No reply was heard from academia. It was like a funeral of professors of social sciences, i.e., erudite but arrogant intellectuals (Song, 1998).

In this atmosphere, university intellectuals became the main target of social blame and reproach. A member of the Presidential Committee of Policy Planning, who was later identified as a professor of business administration, invented the theory of "new intellectuals." According to the definition that the government adopted, a new intellectual refers to an innovator who dares to break outmoded thinking and achieve striking progress in his work field (Kim, 1999; Han, 1999; Kang, 1999). Government emphasized that in order to overcome the national crisis, everyone had to develop creativity and innovative thought at his own workplace and in every space of living. President Kim Dae-Jung stressed the importance of innovation and creativity in an information society that had been entirely neglected in education in Korea. He frequently pointed to the importance of breaking prejudices and stereotypical thinking, stating that "everyone can be an intellectual in an information society if one acquires creativity and innovative thought and skill. 'New intellectuals' indicate people who contribute to productivity and affluence of living by innovative thought and creative activity. What we need now in economic distress is that person, a new intellectual."⁶ The theory of the new intellectual became a political slogan with an aim of

⁵This is a rather strong and ideological expression. But it implies how people reacted to IMF at the time.

⁶This is from the President's speech in April, 1999.

encouraging people in distress caused by economic crisis. The government announced a long list of new intellectuals selected by certain criteria, which contained interesting figures like a comedian, a peasant, and a Peking noodle deliveryman. The reasons were obvious: the comedian being a movie director; the peasant applying innovative technology that he invented; and the deliveryman being rated for quick and immediate service.

As the government stressed that the knowledge developed by new intellectuals was a product of innovative thinking in pursuit of efficiency and utility, it could not be denied that this knowledge was not a source of ethical and moral thinking, but of making money (Lee, 1999). Knowledge is an essential source of producing economic values in information society; thus it is natural to think that new intellectuals are equipped with useful and efficient skills and informative technology. In fact, the new intellectuals on the governments list share a common trait distinguished from 'old intellectuals' in universities.⁷ Whereas old intellectuals interpret ethical meanings and moral values from diverse bodies of knowledge, new intellectuals utilize and apply what they invent at the workplace. In many public speeches the President intentionally emphasized that an information society needed such intellectuals who always make an effort to enrich living conditions by introducing innovative thinking (Chun, S., 1999).

The concept of new intellectuals promotes the 'massification of intellectuals', to which old intellectuals naturally expressed a strong cynical response.⁸ Despite the fact that old intellectuals admitted their failure in the prevention of the national crisis, and accepted that they were responsible for the disaster, they strongly opposed the usage of the 'new intellectual' as implying technological innovators and artful speculators, without an ethical and moral implication for common goods and just cause. For the last two years, one could easily imagine cynical conversations among university professors that "we, the old intellectuals, had better disappear from the stage and hand over our status to the new intellectuals."

Moreover, professors of humanities and social sciences, the typical old intellectuals, had to weather the high pressure of university reform concomitantly. The reform was to destroy the 'kingdom of professors' that they had governed for decades, since it planned to remove the departmental division in humanities and social sciences, and integrate similar study fields into larger units. It ultimately meant the dismissal of professors whose lec-

⁷Professors in Universities called themselves as 'old intellectuals' that delivered cynical implication.

⁸'Massification' is borrowed from Alvin Toffler's *Power Shift*.

tures are not demanded by students. Professors in departments of history, literature, and philosophy were the main target of this trend. They were the core group of intellectuals in the 1960s and the 1970s who were faithful to the two cultures of intellectuals, ethical values and intelligentsia orientation. Professors of social sciences felt a lesser risk but were in sympathy with them. Recently, old intellectuals belatedly tried to rehabilitate their status in society, where the dominant concern of students and the public had already shifted to information technology and practical mass culture.

PROFESSORS AND POLITICS IN THE DEMOCRATIC AGE

It is certainly true that university professors have been a power group in Korea compared to other occupations in various aspects. This explains why the top 5% of students in prestigious universities wanted to be professors as life-long careers. Professorship, the *literati* in modern Korea, means high social status and respect from people regardless of economic rewards. In addition, it is worth mentioning that their preference may hide political aspirations since professors in prestigious universities enjoy easy access to the core of power groups of central politics. University professors have been the main pool of recruitment of new and fresh faces for politics since the liberation of 1945. Authoritarian regimes willingly made use of this channel of recruitment in order to compensate for their weak legitimacy. The late President, Park Chung-Hee, appointed numerous professors in academia to advisory committees and as cabinet members to placate the opposition of the intellectual community against authoritarian politics. It is told that President Park bore a high respect for the *literati*, i.e., university professors, and arranged for higher salaries and better research environments.

The attitude of authoritarian leaders contrasts with their democratic counterparts who paid relatively lesser attention to university professors and sometimes tried to eliminate the bubble professors have enjoyed. It is ironic that President Kim Dae-Jung received high support from old intellectuals in universities prior to the presidential election, but was himself the advocator of new intellectuals in place of old *literati*. This is not the only reason why the political support of university professors for him has declined for the last two years. The most prominent reason is probably the fact that he gradually realized himself to be more erudite than any professors of social sciences in national economy, politics, and society. He himself is the author of various books and articles published in English, French, and German, and is a founder of the theory of 'Mass-Participatory Economy' (Kim, D., 1997). An unidentified rumor tells that he would not listen to scholars' suggestions

and policy recommendations regarding specific issues. Thus, it is understandable why university professors gradually turned their backs on him and began to show a cynical attitude to Kim Dae-Jung and his government.

Although university professors were the main contributors to democratization, they began to lose political influence in the democratic age. There are many factors undermining their power. First, democratization deprived them of the traditional role as intelligentsia and their interests returned to their research professions. Most professors with an intelligentsia orientation vainly attempted to advance socialist or social democratic ideologies after the demise of the socialist bloc as an alternative to the Korean version of 'mean democracy'. The economic crisis deprived the intellectual community of room to reflect on the utility and adequacy of socialist ideology as a desirable alternative. Lecture courses for radical and critical theories of development lost students' attention dramatically in contrast to the popularity of lectures offered by business and law schools. The return of student revolutionaries from factories and opposition movements to the university campus did not rehabilitate students' interest in radical and revolutionary theories. Most of them abandoned the revolutionary mission and plunged into state examinations to become bureaucrats or lawyers. Others chose Chaebol firms, which they had criticized as the national enemy, as their life-long workplace.

Second, the democratic government widened the range of recruitment of statesmen from other sectors, including student and labor movements, religious groups, lawyers, CEOs in private firms, news-casters, and even entertainers.⁹ The monopoly status that professors had enjoyed seemed to decline with the coming of democracy. University professors were once regarded as the only 'gentlemen's club' from which authoritarian leaders could select and recruit prominent figures to strengthen the political capacity. However, democracy forced the door of the gentlemen's club to be widely open.

Third, the increase in the number of professors eroded their scarcity value in contrast to the rise of the business class due to economic growth. Business people were once regarded as a 'second-class citizens' compared to professors, but the social status slowly changed and was even reversed. In the early 1980s, graduate students going abroad to study, especially to the United States, were highly demanded in marriage markets far beyond job-takers in large firms and even reserve lawyers who passed state examina-

⁹It is not peculiar to Korea that an entertainer is elected as assemblyman. But such phenomenon is too often in Korea.

tions. However, graduate students wishing to become professors dropped dramatically to the bottom of the marriage market due to smaller salaries and long period of waiting before getting a job in academia which was already full saturated with foreign Ph.Ds in the 1990s.

Finally, journalists like to dig up disreputable affairs of professors since they harbored a negative attitude toward the enclave-like status of professors. Many corrupt acts professors committed in the recruitment of new faculty members and other social affairs are frequently reported in newspapers with headlines like "the corruption of social leaders." Monopoly status inevitably generates corruption, and academia is not exempt. Consequently, the sacred image of academia has gradually been tainted with the deployment of anti-corruption movements by government and civil organizations. It is told that Korea is well known for deep-rooted corruption in all spheres of society. Due to anti-corruption actions and movements, 'sacred precincts' almost disappeared in Korea. As academia is no longer respected as a clean and sacred institution, the people's trust in professors also declined rapidly.

Nevertheless, the university still remains the first pool from which political leadership recruits new candidates for politics. As with previous leaders, President Kim Dae-Jung is still surrounded by numerous professors in the Blue House, and develops his ideas from the advice of 'bodyguard' intellectuals. One thing to mention regarding his government is that fewer faculty members of Seoul National University are found in the presidential advisory group. Before Kim's government, the bulk of the presidential advisory group was composed of faculty members of the colleges of social sciences and humanities of Seoul National University, the most prestigious university in Korea. Now, the character of the advisory group has changed to amalgamated figures from various institutions, including local and less prestigious universities, leaders of opposition movements, and professional career women. This is favorable evidence of democratization, but is also indicative of the decline of monopoly power that old intellectuals had enjoyed for so long.

THE DECLINE OF INTELLECTUAL POWER: MASSIFICATION OF INTELLECTUALS

Globally, the advancement of information technology contributes to the undermining the power of old literati who monopolize knowledge. Korea is not an exception. As people access knowledge and information from computer websites, and the nature of knowledge changes dramatically from the object of learning to the product of creating and manufacturing, the utility

of university professors as instructors and researcher quickly withers (Searle, 1993; Breneman, 1994; Kerr, 1995). University professors are embarrassed by a feeling of uselessness which stems from the fact that the university lecture is rapidly replaced by internet communication, and that the internet revolution may eventually make universities obsolete. In an era in which so many experts in other institutions provide useful information for various purposes, it is obvious that the university professor cannot satisfy the diversified demand for high-quality information and knowledge. Universities cannot afford proper knowledge for niche markets where newcomers with computer technology proliferate. It is not an exaggeration to say that every one can be *digiterati* (literati in a digital era) in the internet era once he produces specific and useful information and knowledge, and succeeds in attracting consumers. Old literati have to share monopoly status with new groups with artful skills and technology of computer operations. The final outcome is the "massification of intellectuals."

The massification advances in various ways in Korea. first, many people began to emerge as authors and writers regardless of educational achievement. A decade ago, university professors, journalists, and men of letters formed the main group of authors. However, writing and publishing are no longer an appropriation of the literati, but can be accomplished by ordinary persons who think that their experience and knowledge on specific issues are worth sharing. Recently, university professors are rarely found on the bestseller list. In contrast, television actors, entertainers, and journalists are frequently ranked as authors of bestsellers. For example, a television actress ignited wide social attention by publishing an autobiography confessing her sexual experiences. That topic was one that sociology professors had long planned to analyze, but in vain. This was because they still tended to think that exposure of individual sex life to society, even in the analytical style, was premature in Korea. Moreover, they could not find financial supporter for the research.

The massification of intellectuals is promoted inversely by the compartmentalization of humanities and social sciences. The specification makes communication between professors and the public more difficult because of the academic jargons they use. It has been long since professors stopped communicating with each other across departmental boundaries.¹⁰ For instance, it is really difficult to reach a consensus between professors of economics and sociology when they discuss the Korean economy, because of

¹⁰University is just like an airport. The office is a gate from which airplanes take off for their different destinations. They never collide each other. David Damrosch (1995).

the level of specification (cf., Damrosch, 1995). Economists like to employ extremely analytical tools, while sociologists tend to begin the analysis from plain words and concepts. In addition, a strong distrust between specialists and generalists exists even in the college of social sciences. Whereas the generalist prefers to talk with the masses, the specialist prefers to detach himself from the public.¹¹ Thus, new intellectuals satisfying popular demand began to appeal to the public.

Above all, the rapid development of private research institutions accelerated the decline of professors' intellectual influence. As private companies began to invest tremendous resources in research and development, research institutions have proliferated and produced attractive outcomes regarding social, economic, and political phenomena. For instance, university institutes prime organizations undertaking social surveys, but they had to take over the job to private survey companies. Chaebol firms operate research institutions of their own that employ promising and productive Ph.D.s. They are quite competitive in terms of research techniques and specialty in comparison with university professors. Better working conditions with higher salaries and fringe benefits in private research institutions encourage them to produce higher quality outcomes. It seems likely that the competitiveness of universities declined more rapidly than expected. High-grade brains in private institutions began to improve their chances of participation in social and economic affairs by utilizing their research outcomes (Keohane, 1994; Stigler, 1993; Cole, 1993).

The decline of intellectual power is the natural consequence of the inertia embedded in the university in resistance to any outside pressure to reform. Departmental division of academia cannot satisfy the diversified demand newly emerging with structural and generational changes. In contemporary society, new demands emerging at the very division between study fields become more important and attractive to ordinary people, while professors sticking to traditional arenas are still immersed in old-fashioned topics and interests. University professors sticking to the old orthodoxy lose the rising niche markets to those new intellectuals who dare to explore hidden worlds of interest (Damrosch, 1995).

This explains why professors began to pay attention to the crisis of humanities (Lee, J., 1999). They complained that fewer students are interested in classics, literature, and philosophy, and that their writings are dormant in libraries and bookstores. These were the intellectuals highly

¹¹In Korea, the university authority strengthens the criteria of evaluation and promotion of professors by introducing American standard.

demanding by journalism and mass media decades ago. The old good days are gone. Nevertheless, it is a rather hasty conclusion that intellectual power has entirely declined in Korean society since neither high-grade brains in private research institutions nor new intellectuals are attentive to the traditional role of intellectuals. New intellectuals in the process of massification are emerged in the capitalization of knowledge, ignoring the moral aspects of knowledge.

THE DIVERSIFICATION OF DISCOURSE: THE CHALLENGE FROM OUTSIDERS

History tells that it is the marginal group that promotes innovation to the main current. Although professors have been deeply involved in politics and social affairs despite the decline of their influence, rebellious groups of intellectuals emerged against the main current and privileged intellectual circles. The rise of niche markets and the inability of professors to fill them encouraged the emergence of so called 'guerrilla intellectuals' in the 1990s — "guerrilla" because of their desperate and unceasing attacks on professors' academic attitudes and their orientations to remain strongly protected by institutions (Intellectual Report 3, 1999). The guerrilla intellectuals are themselves the product of universities. As soon as they received higher degrees, they declared themselves to be warriors against the inertia and indolence of the university in terms of outdated curricula, moldy methods of teaching and research, and the conflict of interests discouraging new ideas and innovation of campus (Chun, S., 1999).

They share the common experience of failing to secure jobs in universities for many reasons. First, Ph.D.s from domestic institutions have a lesser chance of getting teaching jobs. Furthermore universities began to reduce new recruitment, especially of humanities and social sciences, because of financial shortages and structural adjustment. Korean universities prefer Ph.D.s from foreign universities to those of domestic institutions, so that domestic Ph.D.s have a disadvantage in the competition for a few vacancies. Some Ph.D.s permanently gave up hoping to get a university job, but instead entered the circle of guerrilla intellectuals.

They declared themselves to be independent of academia, but also identified themselves as the main fighters against the privilege of academia and the stubbornness of the intellectual community. According to their propaganda, Korean academia is confronted with its limitation and academicians reveal their inability to provide diagnoses and prescriptions for a contemporary Korean society in drift. Thus, they contend that an anti-intellectual atti-

tude is strategically requested to destroy the limitations of professional intellectuals. According to their evaluation, professors in the humanities and social sciences are either importers of foreign theories or cunning impostors who deceive students and the public by appropriating research outcomes of foreign scholars as their own. They are discontent with the fact that professors are negligent in developing new curricula and lectures that satisfy new demands from students. Students are no longer those of the revolutionary era, but sons and daughters of affluent society, i.e., a new generation, that shows greater interest in the new tastes and preferences of cultural consumption. They are convinced that the paradigm of social sciences has already shifted to culture in place of state, politics, and economy and, consequently, that academia has to pay more attention to mass culture as an essential force of social change.

Journals, magazines, and periodicals are the main channel for them to express their opinions and publish their writings. Leading groups of guerrilla intellectuals became editors of several magazines and journals that carried their social and cultural criticisms. In the early 1990s, when there was a sudden lack of a dominant ideology after the demise of socialism, their fresh voices received support from graduate students and other intellectuals who felt isolated from the main current. A few thousand copies of their magazines and journals were sold out and they gained spiritual supporters. But their heyday did not last long. The economic crisis of 1997 and the austerity policy under the IMF regulation drained most resources of guerrilla criticism with the fundamental transformation of social consciousness and styles of thinking. Supporters were forced to think that culture was important but still an extravagance in the face of the national crisis that gave rise to fatal damage on the economic bases of life.

It seems that although the guerrilla rebellion is significantly weakened, it cast important tasks on academia. First of all, they diversified the universe of discourse in academia, introducing cultural debates and interpretations to standardized curricula. They left a lesson to academia that intellectuals have to be more concerned with the variegated interests of the public and the new generation. The guerrilla intellectuals operated an alternative school, the so-called 'school of culture,' with the financial support of a publishing company. They declared that the purpose of the school of culture was to incorporate new demands of younger students and to discuss what was lacking in university lectures. It was a partial success, but, intellectual rebellion finally failed. Some of them are searching for another rebellion, maintaining their living by selling their writings to journals and magazines. Universities survived, but with serious wounds. Professors in ivory towers

feel extreme anxiety in the face of social blame, external attack, and institutional reform, and they realize that an earthquake will shake the intellectual community in the near future.

PROFESSORS AS PUBLIC INTELLECTUALS: CAN THEY FLOURISH?

Will the external social changes and challenges encroach upon the prestige and power of university professors in Korea? Probably not. The changing portrait described so far induces a more pessimistic vision of the role of university professors. To conclude in a more optimistic tone is not consistent with what has been described so far. However, focus on the dark side of the picture purports to nurture the bright side of the same coin. In fact, intellectuals played an essential role in Korean history and as history enters hard times, intellectuals undertake great missions for the nation and people. Throughout the modern era, professors in Korea have stood at the forefront of enriching social justice and building the ethical foundation of the society. While some intellectuals were mobilized as ideologues for authoritarian regimes, other groups of intellectuals struggled for the achievement of democracy in loyalty to the traditional legacies, i.e., intelligentsia. When authoritarian leaders conducted violent and brutal repressions against ordinary people, intellectuals raised their voices against the violation of human rights and social justice. Despite many changes, the two cultures of *Seonbi* and intelligentsia are still alive in academia.

Each culture has its historical supporters. Chung Yak-Yong is a supporter of *Seonbi* and Han Yong-Un supports the latter. Chung Yak-Yong was a deported scholar in the Yi Dynasty, living in his birthplace, a small island that was located in Southwest province. He left many memorable books including <*Mokminsimseo*> (牧民心書) and <*Kyongseyupyjo*> (經世遺表). The first book consists of political writings concerning the principles of ruling people and the latter gives economic guidance for state finances and economic prosperity. On the other hand, Han Yong-Un was a buddhist monk, as well as a famous poet for nationalism in the colonial period. His life was devoted to national independence and liberation from Japanese colonialism.

If public intellectuals refer to extraordinary people who devote themselves to the improvement of common goods and social justics, and who provide ordinary people with just principles and philosophies to live by, this spirit is abundant in the Korean traditon of intellectuals. It can be contended that the combination of the spirits of *Seonbi* and intelligentsia, the two cultures of intellectuals in Korea, are sufficient for literati to become public intellectuals. The two cultures correspond to theory and practice in

the Western tradition. Among various sectors in Korean society, the university still remains the spiritual reservoir that produce enlightened avant-gardes for social justice and moral values in the wave of globalization, that drives ordinary people and leading groups to become greedy for profits. Despite the fact that university professors in Korea lost some of their prestige and reputation as watchmen of society, they have received more expectations from ordinary people and have assumed more important missions than their counterparts in Western society. As is described in this short paper, although the public image of university professors is strained for many reasons, it can be assured that their role as public intellectuals will continue in Korea. Some examples support such a prediction.

First, professors will govern the highest institutions of learning, and so long as the Korean people maintain high educational aspirations, professors will resume the capacity to implement the role pertinent to what people expect. They are still 'first-class citizens' in pursuit of ethical lessons and moral implications of knowledge. Second, it is peculiar to Korean society that professors actively participate in new social movements, the goals of which government and business are frequently opposed to. Professors constitute the leading group of most NSMs currently in Korea. This can also be a weakness of Korea's NSMs, but it is sufficient for the point of this paper to say that NSMs cannot be activated without professors' initiation and devotion. For instance, feminist movements are led by female professors, environmental movements by a few professors whose specialty is closely related to ecological protection, and human rights movements by professors of law schools and other related study fields. Professors also vehemently organized the civil coalition against corrupt politicians in the last general election on April 13, 2000, and received national support. As Karl Mannheim (1956) defined in his *Ideology and Utopia*, university professors in Korea constitute the only social group that is fully ready to be a 'free-floating intelligentsia.'

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