

## **Social Darwinism in Korea and Its Influence on Early Modern Korean Buddhism<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Introduction**

In the December 1931 issue(num. 28) of the popular Korean journal, *Tonggwang*(The Eastern Light), a poem in prose appeared, the name and content of which represented to a very high degree the *Zeitgeist* of pre-colonial and early colonial modernity in Korea. The poem was titled “The New Understanding of Might”, and its lines read as follows:

“The Cosmos is Might. All phenomena are the rhythm of the energy’s metamorphoses. There is no Cosmos without Might. Now, the war clouds are hanging heavy over the continent of Asia. The attack is signalled, the storm is ordered, and the cannon smoke is rising. This is the expression of a nation’s might. The strengths of two nations collide with each other.

There are no plainer representations of the form of Might than War. It is just like wind, water and lightning representing best the force of Nature.

War requires healthy physical, intellectual, and spiritual strength [...] War between two nations is, in the end, the comparison of the complex strengths of the two contestants.

But the problem is just that we do not possess this strength, The

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Might of body, brains, and spirit. That is why, on today's scene where the whole of humanity is mobilized and already gone into action, we cannot assume a role and just crouch behind the curtain, a bunch of people without even a family name! But, when we acquire strength, humanity will politely send us an invitation to the scene.

Today is the day of the cultivation of strength!"

This small poem, well-timed to the Manchurian Incident (September 18, 1931) and the start of the new round of Japanese aggression against China, is interesting not only for its — dubious, at best, — literary merits, but also because it was written by a highly symbolical figure in early modern Korean intellectual history — Lee Gwangsu (1892~1950), an acknowledged writer of the first classic of the modern Korean novel and one of the most eminent theoreticians of moderate cultural nationalism in colonial Korea. But, while the connection between the poem's blunt Social Darwinist cult of Might and nationalist thought can look fully possible to any commonsensical view, other important features of the author's profile will definitely look highly incompatible with the paeans to might and violence: Lee Gwangsu started his career as a devoted Protestant Christian and Tolstoy's most influential follower in Korea. He later combined both Christianity and Buddhism into a sort of synthetic religion built on "universal ethical" foundations. Two of his most important novels are dedicated to the Buddhist devotees and learned monks of early Korea (6~7<sup>th</sup> C.), and he is known to have spent his last years — after the end of Japanese colonialism and before the Korean War — in the temple where his relative, a famous Buddhist scholar, was an abbot. The natural question arises: how the religious — Buddhist — devotion with explicit "universal ethical" overtones could co-exist with the hymns to violent strength?<sup>2</sup> And another question — very important even now to the Korean public still traumatized with the reality of pro-Japanese collaboration by a large part of the colonial Korean elite — is: what kind of motives eventually led Lee Gwangsu, a deeply religious person and nationalistic Social Dar-

winist simultaneously as he was in his own way, to become one of the leading pro-Japanese literati at the time of Pacific War, and to write some of the most notorious examples of poetical praise for Japanese military efforts?<sup>3</sup> In a word: how could it happen that a person's Buddhist religious beliefs were so well adopted and adjusted to the "national might"-centred Social Darwinist worldview, to the point of acknowledging and praising Japanese expansionist designs built — in certain aspects — on the basis of popularised Social Darwinist schemes?

The first way to explain this unlikely fusion of merciful religion and a quite merciless modern creed is to remember to what degree the impact of Social Darwinism on early modern Korean intelligentsia was strong and lasting. The impact was extremely deep and pervasive. For some time (approximately between the 1900s and 1920s) Social Darwinism functioned as a common, unifying mood of thinking for almost all major groups and personalities of modernization-oriented urban intelligentsia. Individuals able to transcend its boundaries after being strongly influenced by it remained a small minority. This contrasts sharply with the situation in Japan, where by 1900s the influence of Social Darwinism, once paramount, started to wane quickly, mainly on account of the strengthening of the "Imperial Way" official ideology among the Right and deeper acquaintance with Socialist doctrines among the leftist opposition. But in the case of Korea, even after the beginning of the ideological demarcation between the Right and the Left in the 1920s, when much more elaborate ideological constructions started to be built instead, Social Darwinism still was recognized — quite openly on the Right and more implicitly on the Left — as a certain set of almost infallible basic assumptions about the essential nature of modern society, if not human society in general. In its heyday in the 1900s~1910s, Social Darwinism was taken very much as a totalising, all-explaining ideology able to supplant — or, in some less popular variations, augment and "modernize" — the "eternal truth" of Confucian teaching as a guiding spirit in both private and social life. For many young intellectuals aspiring to understand the basic principles of the new, "enlightened and modern" world, Social Darwinism was

to a very high degree synonymous with “foreign thought” and “modernity”. Perhaps even more so, as this creed was on the one hand totally unconnected to the ideologies of traditional time-having no analogues, not even very crude ones, among them — and on the other hand structurally close to orthodox Neo-Confucianism as a philosophy explaining both natural and social phenomena. Before the transition through Japan or directly from the USA took place, Social Darwinist assumptions remained fully unknown even to the most progressive of Confucian literati of the 1870~early 1880s(until 1883): anything even remotely resembling it could hardly emerge in the realm of orthodox Neo-Confucian ethicist doctrine. Commonplace among the more progressive parts of the traditional Confucian political class of the 1870~early 1880s was the talk of the necessity of self-strengthening in the world of aggressive warring Western states in order to forestall for example, Russian expansion. However the idea of war, aggression and expansion as a positive necessity of evolutionary process did not enter the Confucian minds before the experience of Japanese and Western education came<sup>4</sup>. At the same time, a general crisis of Neo-Confucian ideology — which already was keenly felt in the 18<sup>th</sup> C., leading to the blooming of less rigid and more practical interpretations of Confucianism collectively known as *Sirhak*(Real Learning School) — created a certain demand for a new all-explaining, all-encompassing creed — a demand practically satisfied by Social Darwinism for several decades of early modern Korean history.

The rush to introduce, internalise, and utilize Social Darwinism so characteristic of “pro-modern” Korean intellectuals of the 1880~1920’s can be understood and explained from several viewpoints. One, the most conventional, is to recall that harsh realities of the time — internal crisis aggravated by external aggression threatening the very existence of independent Korean statehood — naturally sparked the interest in the theory supposedly explaining the deeper evolutionary context of international rivalry and showing in most manifest ways the urgent necessity of “self-strengthening” and reforms. In this connection, it is also usually recalled that, in the Korean — as well as in the Chinese and Japanese — case, the

“struggle for survival” was generally understood, first and foremost, as rivalry between nations, not persons, while “cooperation and patriotism” were supposed to be the most optimal and effective way of interaction between the subjects of the same state. In a nutshell, this popular view concentrates the attention on the fact that the state or “nation”(after the demise of Korean statehood in 1910), not an individual, was the subject of “struggle” and “evolution” for Korean Social Darwinists — the members of a reformist elite group using the imported ideology for the first attempts at “modernization from above”<sup>5</sup>. The same penchant for interpreting the dogma of “evolutionary struggle” as first and foremost competition between groups(*gun*), was, as has often been noted by researchers<sup>6</sup>, characteristic also of the prominent Chinese and Japanese followers of the Darwinian creed(notably, Liang Qichao and Katō Hiroyuki). The famous phrase from Liang Qichao’s well-known manifesto, *Xinminshuo*(New People), — “Freedom means freedom for the group, not freedom for the individual. (...) Men must not be slaves to other men, but they must be slaves to their group. For, if they are not slaves to their own group, they will assuredly become slaves to some other”<sup>7</sup> — can be seen as the best succinct definition of East Asian Social Darwinism’s general attitude towards the problem of the relationship between an individual and his collective.

Another view also emphasizes that — while being used sometimes for diametrically opposing purposes(by pro-Japanese Koreans in order to justify the Japanese war against Russia as part of “racial struggle for survival”, and by anti-Japanese authors in order to support an all-out “struggle for existence” against Japan) — Social Darwinism remained a predominantly elitist tool, useful for denouncing or deploring the “unenlightened state” of the masses and advocating the priority of “state’s rights”( *kukkwŏn*) over that of state’s subjects(*minkwŏn*) by the small circle of “enlightened” reformists<sup>8</sup>. A very interesting recent study of comparatively late Social Darwinist writings of the 1920s stresses the Westernising zeal of elitist reformers — a self-appointed “chosen”, “central” class, who considered as its mission the thorough destruction of Confu-

cian tradition, to be replaced by “Western” mentality and institutions<sup>9</sup>. What transformed into the theory of the elitist “reconstruction collective”(kaejojuŭi tanch’ŕe, in Lee Gwangsu’s popular terminology) in the 1920s, when Korea was already deprived of the independent statehood, was the dominant infatuation of the Social Darwinists of the 1900s with J.K.Bluntschli’s ideas of “organic” statehood, popularised by contemporary Chinese and Japanese ideologues(Liang Qichao and Katō Hiroyuki again played key roles). While Liang Qichao stated authoritatively in *Xinminshuo*, that “the state is the highest form of the group”<sup>10</sup>, one of Liang’s Korean adepts, Kim Sŏnghŭi, was busy explaining to his compatriots in graphical terms of human anatomy and architecture what “state” meant to “modern humanity”:

“Humans are made, from the viewpoint of their physiology, of four limbs, five organs, and the arteries for the movement of globules. That is a ‘group’ on the individual level. (...) Groups, consisting of thousands and tens of thousand people make up the independent states, which inside resemble interlinks between wooden beams and well-adjusted stones in a house. (...) If a wooden beam or a stone would not be a part of a group, the house could not stay independent.”<sup>11</sup> The independence of the state under the rule of a modernizing elite, sought by Korean Social Darwinists, meant the deepening of the masses’ dependence on the elite-dominated “modern” institutions(army, press, schools), and that fact was well reflected in the Social Darwinist theoretical writings, some of them notorious for advocating extreme forms of statism(Kor. *kukkajuŭi*; Jap. *kokka-shugi*).

Completely agreeing with the emphasis put by most South Korean researchers of this phenomenon on its elitist and predominantly — but not always — anti-traditional nature and primacy of state/“nation”-level concerns in its discourse, I want to show in the present paper how the Social Darwinist instruments were used by reformist members of a definitely low-status group — the Buddhist community — in order not to destroy, but on the contrary to vindicate and defend their tradition as able and worthy to survive in the “evolutionary struggle”. Thus, I wish to emphasize

that, for the members of a traditionally discriminated religious community, the demise of Confucian teachings and the import of a new and different “modern” ideology represented hope and opportunity for serious advancement on the social ladder. Also it should be emphasized that their attitude to Social Darwinism was — probably, even in higher degree than the dominant elitist approach of the times — explicitly utilitarian, instrumentalist and “creative”: the Western ideology, rather than being taken as a complete truthful explanation of the society and nature, was just utilized for strategic and tactical purposes as a useful tool to promote certain reforms — religiously motivated anyway — inside the community and to defend the positions of the community externally. In a way, the Buddhist reformist attitudes to Social Darwinism examined here are interesting examples of an attempt by a non-Western tradition at selective appropriation — in good “Eastern spirit, Western technique” fashion, it can be said, - of Western ideological instruments for survival and growth in a new, Western-defined world. But, before starting to speak of the Buddhist encounter with Social Darwinism, I should first like to mention the main channels used for importing Social Darwinism into Korea.

### **First Encounters with Social Darwinism**

Chronologically speaking, the first route for introduction of the new “guiding principle” for natural, personal and social life was via Japan and the United States simultaneously. It is not so surprising if we remember that one of the first “apostles” of Spenserian theory in Japan was an American biologist, Edward Morse(1838~1925), who started to teach zoology in the newly established University of Tokyo in 1877. One of first Korean students to be sent to Japan in 1881, Yu Giljun (1856~1914) — the person who became the future architect of the Japanese-guided radical *Kabo* reforms of 1894~1895 — was so interested in Morse teachings, as interpreted to him by his Japanese mentor, the famous Fukuzawa Yukichi(1835~1901), that, when sent to the USA in the entourage of the Korean envoy in 1883, he went to study directly under Morse(who had

already returned home) at the Peabody Museum(Salem, Massachusetts). The product of this first direct transmission of Western Social-Darwinist ideas onto Korean soil was a small treatise, titled explicitly *Kyōngjaeng non*(On Competition), written by Yu presumably soon after his return from Japan in 1883 and before his trip to the USA. This treatise — which remained unpublished, but very likely was circulated privately in intellectual circles — signals a radical change in Yu’s ideas, which previously were mostly formed by liberal interpretation of Confucianism in the tradition of the “Real Learning School”<sup>12</sup>. Yu’s memorial to the throne written in 1883, before his departure for the USA, was mostly concerned with the implications of international law(*man’guk kongbōp*) on the question of the legal status of Korean residents in the Russian Maritime Province and possible hostile designs by Russians. Yu did not however even mention the word “competition”<sup>13</sup>. However, his treatise on competition does not even mention international law. In a nutshell, it states that competition, both on the interpersonal and interstate levels, shapes everything in the world. A sweeping statement to this end opens the first page of the treatise:

“Among all the affairs of human life, it is impossible to find any that does not rely on competition. Beginning with the matters of the states under Heaven, and down to the affairs of one’s household — everything begins to progress due to competition. Were no competition in human lives, how could wisdom, virtues and happiness be advanced? If the states did not compete with each other, how could they increase their strength, wealth, and prestige? Generally, competition starts with personal cultivation of wisdom and virtue and then reaches literature, crafts, and also all kinds of agriculture and commerce. Everybody compares his relative achievements to that of the others and wishes to surpass them. (...). Generally speaking, dull-witted men and women barely avoid cold and hunger. As they just sleep and eat, do not make a single effort to advance themselves and know nothing about self-cultivation, they are doomed to live and die in poverty and stupidity. The only reason for this is their ultimate lack of competitive spirit. (...) At the same time, the gentlemen of deep



intents and wisdom daily cultivate their wisdom and virtue and daily improve their skills, thus contributing to the world, advancing their occupations and bringing prestige and happiness to their families. Those who are useful to the states under Heaven are necessarily the people with a strong and lofty competitive spirit.”<sup>14</sup> Typically for “Darwinian Confucian”, Yu blends a Social Darwinist view of poverty — and, wider, social inferiority — as an inescapable consequence of “natural selection” with characteristically Confucian adoration of “gentlemen of wisdom” (*kunja*), who exhaust themselves in cultivating their “virtues”, which are ultimately to benefit the state. The idea that “gentlemen of wisdom” are to compete with each other in their pursuit of virtue and wisdom — unthinkable in traditional Confucianism where competition was seen as vulgarity befitting small-time self-seekers — was perhaps the strongest Darwinian innovation in this synthesis. Still, to present his cause in a better light to his Confucianist contemporaries, Yu also had to justify his approval of competition by citing a famous dictum by the Master: “The gentleman of wisdom does not compete. If unavoidable, shall he compete in archery? But he bows complaisantly to his competitors, ascends the hall, descends, and exacts the forfeit of drinking”<sup>15</sup>. Such was Confucius’ praise to the gentleman-like competition of the noble spirits, claims Yu. It is not surprising also, that the “intense and unrelenting efforts in self-cultivation” by a “village Confucian” who had felt ashamed by being compared to a more advanced “urban scholar”, are offered by Yu as an example of the beneficial effects of competition on society.<sup>16</sup>

As was also characteristic of East Asian elitist Social Darwinism as a whole, interstate competition is paid primary attention: it is understood as the basic content of any type of interstate intercourse, be it trade (“peaceful competition”) or war (“violent competition”). The woes of Asia, the land of “fertile soils and lazy populace”, — be it the weakness of Korea or “the enslavement of India by the British Government” — are primarily explained as logical, natural consequences of the “chronic lack of any type of intercourse”, not only with the Europeans, but even among the Asian states themselves. Only the incessant “self-strengthening” for

victory in actual and potential competition is the key to success and the very existence of a state, emphasizes Yu. The uncompetitive state, typical of Asia, is usually unable even to preserve itself intact, and the strength and competitiveness of European states is acquired through long centuries of wars, trade and diplomacy.

But Yu — also characteristic of early Korean Social Darwinism, unacquainted still with the racist underpinnings of European and American “classical” Social Darwinist ideology, — is quite optimistic about Korea’s future. Success in the ranks of “civilized powers” is guaranteed, once competition is taken up seriously. As to interpersonal competition, it is very much downplayed, reduced to “competition in academic successes and loyalty” to the state, the main subject of what Yu considered global evolution. In fact, in good Confucian tradition, Yu even assumed the necessity of “cordial unity of the seniors and juniors” for the sake of success in international rivalry. This fusion of Social Darwinism on a macro-level and traditional Confucian ideas of “loyalty and unity” on a micro-level is very typical of the first stage of Social Darwinism’s introduction to Korea, when it was primarily understood in relation to the shocking international reality, unexplainable from the traditional Confucian position.<sup>17</sup> In addition, Yu himself, his genuine admiration for American institutes notwithstanding, belonged to a rather conservative, strongly monarchist group of early modern reformists, wary of possible radical republican implications of Social Darwinist doctrine once it was to be fully applied to domestic politics.<sup>18</sup> As we will proceed to learn more about Buddhist perceptions of current European realities and their ideological Social Darwinist background, it would be interesting also to take into account the fact that Yu, in his later encyclopaedic work, *Sōyu kyōnmun* (A Record of Personal Experience in the West; Tokyo, 1895), considered Catholic religious expansion in the East Asia to be a harbinger of armed imperialistic aggression, something Korea had to forestall.<sup>19</sup> Even before, in the earlier unpublished *Segye taese ron* (Treatise on the Main Tendencies of the World, 1883), Yu warned his compatriots of “becoming slaves to an alien religion”, reminding them that religious matters “pertain to the very basis of

statehood” and that “every state prevents the spread of alien creeds”<sup>20</sup>. As Hō Donghyōn emphasizes in his article in the present collection, a strong orientation towards preservation of Confucian values remains an important characteristic of Yu Giljun’s worldview even after he himself was converted to an “alien creed”, Protestantism, in his later days. Very much like many “modernity”-oriented Chinese intellectuals of the 19th C., attracted by the Western idea of “universally just” international law and law-based on equality and inviolability of the states and their rights<sup>21</sup>, Yu Giljun regarded as ideal a law-governed international society, where “big and small states are just equal states; there are no states above or below others”.<sup>22</sup> The idealized “law-based community of states” seems to have offered a substitute for the orderliness of the old Confucian ritual-based model of international relationship. Still, he could not overlook the reality of imperialistic predations, bitterly criticizing them on both legal and ethical grounds and lamenting in the *Porosaguk Huryeduik tae-wang*(Biography of Prussia’s Friedrich the Great) he compiled in May 1908, that “one thousand words of international law are not worth one piece of artillery”.<sup>23</sup>

While Yu’s understanding of Social Darwinism was probably more strongly influenced by conservative Japanese interpretation of Katō Hiroyuki(1836~1916), with its distinctive emphasis on a traditional collectivistic ethos of submission and obedience,<sup>24</sup> than by American sources, another important early adherent of the creed, Yun Ch’iho (1895~1945), the pioneer of the Methodist Church in Korea (baptized in 1887), received his Social Darwinist “ordaining” — as well as his baptism (1887) — directly from American teachers, without Japanese intermediaries. The first Korean to master fluent English, Yun Ch’ho came to reject Confucian values wholesale and to embrace Social Darwinism in the course of his studies at Vanderbilt University (1888~1893), in the process of deep reflections — philosophic as well as religious — over both his own personal situation and the reality and ideals of the West. A penniless, physically fragile son of an exiled Korean statesman from the semi-gentry “illegitimate” branch of a noble clan, frequently discriminated against and

even verbally and physically assaulted on racial grounds, Yun Ch'ih'o had ample reasons to agonize over the issues of weakness, strength and "struggle for survival". For him, as we can judge from his unusually detailed English diary, Social Darwinist idea of "might" being "right" was inseparable from the Christian theory of God's moral judgement. The conquered Asians — or massacred American Indians — were also "weak" in the moral sense, first and foremost due to their "idolatry", and then to their technical and "racial" level.

"Isn't America better off in the hands of the Anglo-Saxon than she ever was under or rather above the control of the Redman? Indeed it would be hard to instance a single case of domination of one race over another but that we find the stronger has been almost always better or less corrupted in morals, religion and politics than the weaker. Thus we see that what seems to be a triumph of *might over right* is but a triumph of comparative — I don't say absolute — right over comparative wrong. [...]”, — the newly converted persuades himself (November 20, 1892).<sup>25</sup>

Still, the obvious discrepancies between the Christian ethos and the merciless nature of both Social Darwinist postulates and the imperialistic reality behind them seriously beset Yun Ch'ih'o — the truthful new-born Christian and "enlightened" Social Darwinist in one person. He is also greatly worried by the painfully obvious reality of Korea's weakness which to a Social Darwinist could mean that his beloved motherland did not belong to the lucky ranks of the "fittest":

"The greatest obstacle to my belief or faith is the inferiority of one race to another and the evils resulting there from. Why did not God give an equal chance to all the races, Caucasians no superior to Mongolians and Africans no worse than either in physical and mental powers. If He did, the shameful and unjust deeds of *killling out* [italicised in the original; V.T.] one race by another, according to the inexorable law of survival of the fittest would not have disgraced the pages of history. Would He do so, yet could not? Then where is his wisdom? [...] O mystery!

[...] It has often chilled my most sanguine aspirations — the thought that Corea might not be the "fittest" to "survive". Then what? My busi-

ness and duty are to contribute my best to make them fit to live. If they cannot be so made after a fair trial, then they are not fit to survive. God help me to look at things as a man” (October 14, 1892).<sup>26</sup>

### **“Hindrance to Survival” : Social Darwinist Attack on Buddhism**

A devoted and radical Christian, Yun Ch’iho was still optimistic to the point of believing that once backward and “degenerate” Confucianism is done away with and Christianity — “the hope and salvation for Korea” — widely embraced instead. Korea, with its good climate and “racial stock”, has certain chances of both “moral regeneration” and physical “survival”. Still, not surprisingly, political failures of his reformist associates and incessant imperialistic rivalry around the Peninsula were gradually diminishing his hopes of a beneficial application of Social Darwinist “laws” in the Korean case.<sup>27</sup> As to the possible role of Buddhism in the process of making Korea “fitter” for “survival”, Yun was generally strongly negative — we should remember that he possibly was still much better acquainted with and less aggressive towards this religion than the Western missionary *milieu* around him. While conceding that “under a Buddhist government Korea was a better country” than under the Confucianist Chosŏn Dynasty, Yun — in a talk with famous literati, painter and devoted Buddhist, Chi Unyŏng (1852~1935), — remarked that in Buddhist societies metaphysical subtleness of the privileged few was accompanied by the illiteracy of the majority and by general “degradation”. To this “practical” argument, Yun added for himself the doctrinal “abstruseness” and “vagueness” of Buddhism that makes even advanced believers unable to come to any theoretic unity and make the religion a “working” one (December 17, 1893 ~ January 1, 1894).<sup>28</sup> It is remarkable that, being fully aware in detail about all the doctrinal differences between Christianity and Buddhism, Yun in his personal thoughts entrusted to the diary takes only Buddhism’s “abstract” — and thus supposedly “unworkable” — character as the main barrier for developing any sympathy to or interest in

this religion. It shows how strongly the Social Darwinist quest for a “cure” — simultaneously spiritual and physical — for Korea’s “illness”, its lack of “fitness”, influenced the religious consciousness of one of the pioneers of Korean Christianity. Yun Ch’iho’s Christian — and Social Darwinist — radicalism in eradicating all religious and moral “vestiges of the past”, seen as obstacles on the thorny way to Christian salvation and Darwinist “survival”(both envisioned as two sides of all-embracing “progress”) contrasts sharply with Yu Giljun’s tradition-based, gradualist approach. From the point of view of the Buddhist community, the radical Christianity-based brand of Social Darwinism represented by the likes of Yun Ch’iho, was certainly the most threatening: Buddhism, already oppressed by the Confucian administration, now came under additional attack from the radical anti-Confucian camp.

Yun’s understanding of Buddhism as basically a hindrance on the way to both Social Darwinist and Christian “regeneration” of the country was carried further and greatly popularised by the first modern Korean newspaper, the bilingual(English and Korean) *Independent*(*Tongnip sinmun*, 1896.04.07~1899.12.04), established by the Christian Sō Chaep’il (1864~1951; the first Korean to be naturalized in the USA, under the name of Philip Jaisohn) and edited by Yun himself from July, 1898. Considering “superstitious practices” — both popularised Buddhism and shamanism — as harmful as Confucianism to the great design of “regeneration” and “independence”, the newspaper started a systematic anti-Buddhist and anti-shamanistic campaign, both monks and shamans being accused of “parasitism” and “deceiving the people” — in good Confucian tone(the same accusations for centuries were the main tool of Confucian struggle against its spiritual “enemies”). *The Independent* gave a good example of its attitude just one month after coming into being, editorialising in its Korean edition of May 7, 1896 in the following manner:

“People usually believe in absurdities and long for unreasonable things once they lack knowledge. That is why female and male shamans, geomantic teachers and Buddhist monks are able nowadays to charm and captivate commoners into giving them money, luring weak-hearted wom-

enfolk and absurdity-believing males into wasting their property in serving evil spirits. People are deceived just because they are ignorant. [...] Instead of wasting property by treating evil spirits so well, should we not rather use it to help the poor, to build a hospital for the ill or to build a school for educating the people? [...] We are not going to reprimand the female and male shamans, Buddhist monks and geomancy masters, but just warn them, thinking that they themselves are doing all this out of ignorance; once they understand that all those things are empty absurdities useless for the people, they will also stop believing in this. [...]”<sup>29</sup> While popular Buddhist deities (“evil spirits”) and the collection of funds from the laity for temple services (“wasting property”) were essentially conceived to be a “hindrance” on the way to strength, wealth, and ultimate “survival” of the state, original Buddhist doctrine as such was usually exempt from criticism: Yun and Sō systematically emphasized that “today’s Buddhism in China or Korea, reduced to making idols and depriving people of their money, has nothing to do with the teachings of Tathagata Shakyamuni”. Still, the newspaper did not show serious interest in the “original doctrine” either, apparently in the belief that “countries believing in Christianity assiduously, are now the strongest, richest, most civilized, advanced and blessed in the world”(Editorial, Korean edition, January 26, 1897).<sup>30</sup>

The same belief in Christianity as the driving force beyond Europe’s rise to the top of the international “civilization ladder” was largely shared by most pro-reformist, early nationalist newspapers of the 1900s (especially by the *Taehan maeil sinbo*), even if their authors and editors were not Christians religiously.<sup>31</sup> As to their attitude towards Buddhism, the May 15, 1902 editorial in the *Hwangsōng sinmun*, published by moderate reform-oriented Confucianists, seems to be a typical example. Timed with the celebration of Buddha’s birthday, the editorial highly praised the Buddhist theory of retribution for both good and evil acts (as “ultimately similar to the doctrine of the Book of Changes”) and at the same time lamented the believers’ “mistaken faith in the magic abilities of Buddhist deities” and their “misguided rush to needless sacrificial offerings”,

which could only result in “the accumulation of bad *karma*”.<sup>32</sup> “Degraded” contemporary Buddhism was thus represented as oneself’s own enemy, unable even to stick to its “original” positive features. Soon the next editorial — specially dedicated to the world’s religions(August 12, 1902), — informed the readers that Korean Buddhism was already “half dead, half alive”, representing “nothing more than other-worldly hermits in the mountains”.<sup>33</sup> The next year, in a polemic with a conservative Confucianist opponent of “alien Western creeds”, an editorial in the *Hwang-sōng sinmun* (June 6) suggested that the absence of “absurd and superstitious beliefs in shamanistic and Buddhist idols” in Western religions was an indication of their belonging to a “higher stage of civilization’s progress”.<sup>34</sup> Thus, Buddhism, if it wanted to show its relevancy and prove its willingness and ability to join the “march to civilization and survival”, had to meet the “Social Darwinist challenge”: it had to prove that, no less than Christianity, it is compatible with and useful in the period of international “competition”. It also was challenged either to defend its popular cults — the main target of “civilized” and “enlightened” derision — or reform them in ways more suitable to the new, “enlightened”, epoch of “national regeneration”.

### **“More than Competitive Religion” : Social Darwinist Defence of Buddhism**

Unlike the young reformist bureaucrats of the kind Yu Giljun or Yun Ch’iho belonged to — enriched by Japanese and American cultural experience and able to read English books in the original — Buddhist monks almost never travelled to the U.S.A. and Europe and completely lacked European language skills before the early 1920s. Due to the limited travel opportunities and technical difficulties in acquiring and understanding Japanese texts for most monks(largely lacking “modern” education and financial resources), direct comprehension of Japanese Social Darwinist treatises was also in most cases almost impossible. Thus, the two methods of acquainting themselves with Social Darwinism men-



tioned earlier — through either Japanese interpretations or American originals — were practically unavailable to them.

As a result, they had to resort to a third possible channel to familiarize themselves with Social Darwinist currents, namely the works of Chinese exile Liang Qichao, that were enormously popular with the younger, progressively-minded urban intellectuals in the 1900s. Many of Liang Qichao's works were translated into vernacular Korean, published and widely circulated, but even his original writings in Chinese were fully accessible to the Korean Buddhist audience, well-versed in classical Chinese — the main language of doctrinal Buddhist education and scriptures. For the largest part of the Korean public, deprived of the opportunities to make independent learned inquiries from European or American — or even Japanese — sources by linguistic and manifold practical barriers, Liang's version of Social Darwinist teaching was the only one known. Social Darwinism as such was therefore largely identified in the Korea of the 1900s just as "Liang Qichao's doctrine". For many reasons the situation gradually changed after the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910: first, the sale of Liang's books was prohibited (they were deemed "potentially subversive"), and, second, an increased number of Korean students in Japan and converts to Christianity greatly improved the average level of mastery of Japanese and Western languages. Still, before the annexation Liang Qichao<sup>35</sup> dominated to a very large extent the world of Korean "progressive" thought.

As could be expected, every group of the reformist intelligentsia tried to resort to Liang's authority to legitimise its particular favoured "key" to the secrets of "states' wealth and power". Given Liang's versatility and unparalleled ability to correct, shift and change his previous views, it seems no surprise that most of the self-claimed adherents of his thought in Korea could find some congenial pieces in his voluminous writings. For example, Liang's earlier beliefs in Kang Youwei's "preserved religion" of "true" and "progressive" Confucianism and *Datong* utopia<sup>36</sup> were widely known in Korea and adopted by large factions of reformist Confucianist intelligentsia. Typically, Pak Ŭnsik (1859~1925) and his followers even

organized the *Taedong*(*Datong*) religious sect(*Taedonggyo*) in September 1909, putting forward the re-interpreted idea of Confucian *ren* (“humanity”), Liang’s “public virtues”(gong de), and the wish to save the world from chaos and lead it to universal peace and harmony as the main articles of their religious belief.<sup>37</sup> In a similar way, the title of Liang’s seminal essay on the “New People”(Xinminshuo) gave the name to *Sinminhwe*(New People’s Society) — a secret group, established in 1907 by reformist Confucianists, former military officers and U.S.A.-based Christian converts with the aim of securing Korea’s “renovation” internally through adherence to the principle of putting the state’s “freedom” and “survival” above all personal interests, as expounded by Liang. Especially strong was the influence exerted on Korea in the 1910s by Liang’s emphasis on education as the main method of achieving “success in civilization and progress” and by his “organic” theory of statehood borrowed mainly from J.K.Bluntschli(1808~1881) through his Japanese followers. In this atmosphere of a general “rush” to introduce and utilize various parts of Liang’s Social Darwinism-inspired ideological production, it appears only logical that young and progressively minded Buddhists also tried to resort to the same source for finding ways to re-interpret their legacy in “modern” terms and to participate in the general movement for “progress” and “reform”.

The turning of Korea’s younger “modernity”-oriented Buddhists to Liang Qichao’s works was also greatly facilitated by Liang’s own strong ties with Buddhism, well represented to the Korean reading public through various publications of the 1910s. Liang’s inclusive collection of writings, his *Yinbingshi Wenji*(Literary Works from the Ice-drinker’s Studio), printed in Shanghai in 1903, was very soon imported into Korea and widely cited in many publications beginning from 1904~1905 onwards. Among the writings in *Yinbingshi Wenji*, the most direct bearing on the question had a treatise entitled “A Discussion of the Relationship between Buddhism and Social Order”.<sup>38</sup>

According to the treatise, so far as the present relatively inferior state of “civilization” in the whole world in general and in China in particular

made a religion an indispensable tool for bolstering social solidarity in the course of the “struggle for survival”, Buddhism was much more suitable to “progress” than both Confucianism with its lack of proper religious components and Christianity, easily used by Western powers in their depredations. First, claims Liang, Buddhism, unlike dogmatic Confucianism, believes in personal enlightenment based both on personal ethical development and Buddha’s philosophical wisdom (“only one tenth” of which, says Liang, “is yet reached by the Western philosophers”). Second, Mahayana Buddhism is based on the highest sort of altruism. Bodhisattva, Mahayana’s ideal, is sacrificing his personal ultimate goal (the realization of Buddhahood and entering Nirvana) for the sake of saving all living creatures from suffering, until the last of them is saved. Buddhism is not self-sufficient or self-righteous: a Buddhist will never be satisfied with personal awakening or joy in the midst of the ignorance and suffering of others. That, exclaims Liang, is exactly the attitude required from a modern “progressive” citizen, who should not be satisfied with personal intelligence in the midst of his compatriots’ unawareness rather he is supposed to sacrifice personal good for the state’s sake. Third, Buddhism, unlike Christianity, does not lead to world-rejection in search of a better after-life: “paradise” and “hell” stand only for certain states of consciousness in Buddhism and do not represent objects of spiritual attachment. Fourth, “barbaric” Christian beliefs in the physical resurrection of the dead on the Day of Judgment are clearly inferior to the subtler Buddhist idea of the karmic retribution for good and evil. And last but not least, the Buddhist claim of the universal possession of the Buddhahood by — and, thus, equal dignity of — all living creatures, together with the belief in the liberation from suffering by strictly personal spiritual efforts, are regarded by Liang as directly conducive to the most important elements of “modernity” — equality, freedom to pursue progress and self-responsibility. Liang’s conclusion that “all the evolutionary theories of Darwin and Spenser do not go further than two characters ‘cause-and-effect law’ from Buddhist writings” — and that only Buddhist faith can lead the society on the road to “self-help”, “progress”, and ultimate “survival and prosperity”

— could not but greatly encourage Korean Buddhists in their own “battle for survival” against both traditional Confucian disrespect for their religion and “modern” Christian attacks on its “uselessness”.<sup>39</sup>

Another of Liang’s clearly pro-Buddhist texts introduced to the Korean audience in 1907 through publication in the popular “progressive” journal *Sōu* (The Friends in the West) was a short piece of prose entitled *Weixin lun* – The Theory of Mind-only. In that piece Liang, in gorgeous ornate style (which surely appealed well to the sophisticated gentry readership in Korea), summarized Buddhist epistemology in the following way:

“The objects are what are created by the mind and all material things are fictitious illusion: only the mind creates what looks like the objects’ reality (...). All objects under the Heaven are just the objects of the mind. Those who put on green glasses see all things as green, and those who put on yellow glasses see all things as yellow. Those who have barberry roots in their mouths think that all plants taste bitter, and those who have either honey or wheat-gluten in their mouths think that all plants taste sweet. Can we say, thus, that everything is green, yellow, bitter or sweet? We can say that everything is not green, yellow, bitter or sweet, and is also green, yellow, bitter and sweet at the same time. (...) The distinction between green, yellow, bitter and sweet is not in the object, it is in us. And thus we say that all Three Realms<sup>40</sup> are Mind-only”.<sup>41</sup> Liang summarized the *Yogācāra* theory of *vijñapti-mātratā* (“consciousness-only”) without any explicit reference to the problems of “survival struggle”, but nevertheless the approval given by the best-known “progress”-oriented Chinese publicist to the essence of Buddhist thought was definitely of high significance to the embattled Buddhist community in Korea.

An especially well-known monument to the Buddhist portion of general Social Darwinist trends where Liang’s arguments are extensively cited as the proof of Buddhism’s usefulness in the “age of competition” — is the treatise (Manifesto would probably be a better name for it) “On the Revitalisation of Korean Buddhism” (*Chosŏn Pulgyo Yusin non*), written in 1910 (published in 1913) by Han Yongun (penname — Manhae;

1879~1944), a noted representative of the reformist wing of the Korean Buddhist clergy.

Han's Manifesto begins ("The Introduction") symptomatically with philosophical musings on the deeper meaning of the well-known Sino-Korean saying: "Man plans and Heaven decides". Han claims that if Heaven is really able to influence the failure or success of human endeavours, this will cause humans to completely lose their freedom and become "slaves"; but in reality in his view, neither physical Heaven nor the abstract principle ("truth") popularly associated with it, has any bearing on the course of human affairs. While the former is just a plain physical object, the latter "obeys the rules of freedom" which allow the "stronger" and "fitter" to succeed.<sup>42</sup> Thus, from the very beginning of his reformist program, Han radically reinterprets Nature — a statuary, rigid and predestined Neo-Confucian "order of things" is changed into a new, Social Darwinist universe of free "competition" with human-determined results.<sup>43</sup> The Buddhist world is in this way invited — or rather challenged — to the great scene of "competition for survival", which is alone now in determining its future. His radical reinterpretation also echoes Liang's views on the ability of humans — through the process of "artificial selection" — to determine themselves the course of events in their history. Liang's ideas on the relationship between human will and Heaven(nature) are succinctly expressed in his short piece, entitled *Yuantianzhe wuzhi* ("Those Who Blame Heaven, are Weak-willed"), where he cited a famous dictum from *Xunzi* (Fascicle 4, *Rongru*: Of Honor and Disgrace, Paragraph 5): "Those who know themselves, do not blame others; those who know their lot, do not blame Heaven. Blaming others means being desperate; blaming heaven means being weak-willed".<sup>44</sup> Liang explained, in his favourite Buddhist spirit, that "good karma" must be created by "free efforts" and thus only individuals themselves were to be blamed for their failures; as to the *Xunzi*'s "lot", added Liang, it was not uniform Heavenly predestination, but rather "karmic result" of one's past efforts.<sup>45</sup> Liang's overall understanding of the causative relationship in the universe, where Social Darwinist "efforts in the struggle" were blended with Bud-

dhist “cause-and-effect” theories could not but attract the sympathy of Korea’s self-proclaimed Buddhist reformer.

The Manifesto’s first Chapter is the inquiry into the “immanent character” — *sōngjil* — of Buddhism. Once *sōngjil* is not good enough for the task of “survival”, concedes the author, even Cromwell or Martin Luther called back to life cannot accomplish the task of its “revitalization”. But, following the lead of Liang Qichao, who placed Buddhism as “philosophical religion based on true, inner enlightenment” much higher on the “evolutionary ladder” than the “superstition”-centred religions of West Asian origins (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), Han optimistically states that it is exactly Buddhism’s *sōngjil* that gives its followers hopes for a better future. Han declares that, unlike Christianity with its record of forcing ignorant and fanatical people to die on the battlegrounds by threats of “hell fire” or promises of “paradise”, Buddhism is philosophically developed enough to identify both “hell” and “paradise” with inner mental conditions. He then explicitly cites the following excerpt from Liang Qichao (essay *Jinsi wenxueshu zhi tese ji jiweiren*: On the Special Features of Modern Literature and Science and their Great Personalities):

“Both Buddhism and Christianity are of foreign origins and entered China from the outside, but Buddhism achieved great success while Christianity is unable to do so. What are the reasons? Christianity is based exclusively on superstitions and its philosophical doctrine is shallow. It is not enough for the souls of China’s profound gentlemen. Buddhism, being philosophy and religion simultaneously, explains to us that the ultimate way of experiencing the truth is Enlightenment. This Way is entered through Wisdom, and the practice progresses on one’s own strength and efforts. This is Buddhism and it should not be viewed as just one more average religion. [...] Only after Buddhism was introduced to China could Chinese philosophy acquire its distinctive colours [...]”.<sup>46</sup> As we can see, Han, with Liang’s help, answers in kind the accusations — made among others by Christian editors of *The Independent* — that Buddhism is a “superstitious” religion. The “evolutionary ladder” of religions is turned upside down, Buddhism — so much shunned, ignored and even

despised by the reformist milieu of the 1900s — being given the highest possible position.

Having established Buddhism's "rightful place" in the new, "evolutionary order of things", Han further cites Liang Qichao in order to show in detail why Buddhism should be judged superior from all possible viewpoints to Western philosophy as the background of rival Christian beliefs. Interestingly, in certain cases Han even goes further than Liang in claiming higher "evolutionary status" for his religion. For example, Liang, having been disillusioned in moderately reformed Confucianism as a "preserved religion", turned his attention to Buddhism and noticed close typological affinity between Kant's "subject"<sup>47</sup>, endowed with the "faculty of reason" and the ability to explore "transcendental objects", and the Buddhist theory of "Enlightenment" as "personal awakening to the transcendental reality of *Tathātā* ("Suchness")". Han, however, considers Buddhist understanding of noumenon to be far superior to Kantian. According to Han, the noumenal world in Buddhism exists simultaneously on both a personal and universal/cosmic levels, thus being principally different from "narrowly personal" Kantian "subject's abilities of moral judgement and transcendental reasoning". Buddhism, with its idea of transcendental unity between Buddha and all creatures (all of them possessing Buddhahood and thus *Tathātā*'s ultimate reality), is subtler and deeper than Kant's personalist philosophy of "reason" and "moral". Buddhism — following Liang's line of interpretation — is described by Han as the religion of inter-personal and, ultimately, transcendental solidarity between Buddha and the sentient creatures, "enlightenment" being sought and used for a person's own benefit and also for the sake of others.<sup>48</sup> The authenticity of Han's understanding of Kantian philosophy is highly questionable, but whether or not Han's idiosyncratic interpretation of Kantian principles is a consequence of indirect transmission (his main source, Liang, read the German philosopher in Japanese translations) or a deliberate misreading, it perfectly suited Han's intention of turning upside down the argumentation of Yun Ch'ihō and Sō Chaep'il who had accused Buddhism precisely of pecuniary egoism and lack of public concern. Having

also “proven” that other “typically” Western philosophies as interpreted by Liang Qichao — namely, Baconian empiricism and the Cartesian idea of the unity of various branches of knowledge — had been already expounded in deeper form in Buddhist scriptures, Han concluded that once the truth, identifiable with Buddhahood, is one and the same for all living creatures, all more or less reasonable teachings will have to resemble Buddhism in various degrees. In this way Han practically revitalized the age-old practice of East Asian Buddhist apologists (who used to claim that all elements in Confucianism and Taoism that resemble Buddhism are, in fact, just inferior variations on the same theme), artfully remoulding it into “evolutionary” fashion.

The second chapter of the Manifesto takes the “principles” (*chuwǐ*) of Buddhism, mainly reduced by Han to “transcendental equalitarianism” (based on the universal unity of Buddhahood possessed by all living creatures) and consequential “liberalism” (*chayujuǐ*) and “cosmopolitanism” (*segyejuǐ*). The latter, meaning the end of interstate “competition” and wars and equalitarian “unity of states and races” (*injong*), is proclaimed by Han to be the essence of a more advanced stage of evolution, the hope of humanity for the future. This identification of the happier future of “developed” humanity with Buddhism also reflects Liang’s beliefs (after 1902) that, as the best of all religions, Buddhism is best suited to the third (and final) epoch (*Datong*) in the history of human “evolution”. In this way, age-old Buddhist utopian ideas of “Buddha-land” and “Maitreya-world” are re-thought in terms of “evolutionary” theories. Buddha — in evident reply to Christian claims — is also described by Han as a “peerless Saviour”, who had attained his “enlightenment” solely for the benefit of the universe as a whole and all sentient beings. In a way Han’s explanation of the Buddhist “principles” can be read as an attempt by a Buddhist apologist to accommodate what he considered eternal religious truth to the demands of the current century and its language, structured now along Social Darwinism and Christianity-inspired terms.

In Chapter three, “The Revitalization should be preceded by destruction”, and in the following chapters (on Buddhist education, meditation,



abolition of chanting halls in temples, Buddhist missionary work, relocating temples to the cities, worship of various images in temples, Buddhist ceremonies, monks' participation in the economy and marriages of monks and nuns), Han gives a detailed reform program, pointedly aimed at putting the religion's real status in contemporary Korea into correspondence with its high "evolutionary potential". The starting point of the author's reformist vision is his interpretation of the contemporary world — and the Korean — situation: just as "one thousand words of international law are not worth one piece of artillery" in the interstate relationships of an imperialism-plagued world, the truth of immanently morally superior — but practically inferior — Buddhist teaching capitulates to the practical strength of "evolutionary lower", but practically richer and better organized Christian missionary movement. Significantly, following Liang Qichao's Social Darwinist line of argumentation, Han blames first and foremost Buddhists themselves for "voluntarily surrendering their freedom" in their inability to put up a good fight for "survival", considering perfectly normal and natural — for the current period of "barbaric civilization of struggle", of course, — their use of superior resources to the detriment of their rivals.

To outrival Christians, Han proposes on the one hand to make maximum use of the "intrinsic superior qualities" of Buddhism and on the other hand to resort — of course, on the "technical level" only — to the proven and successful methods of the competitors. For example, just as Liang Qichao<sup>49</sup>, Han considered Buddhism "inherently" much more democratic than other religions, both native and foreign, and not only on a doctrinal level, but also in the concrete educational process. An idealized picture of the traditional temple school where students fervently disputed the contentious issues in the scriptures and only then asked teachers for explanations, looks to Han as best suited to the "modern period of freedom and competition"<sup>50</sup>, and he searches for ways to "restore" this "traditional democracy" — already much in a state of decline, as he himself has to acknowledge — and adopt it to the modern ways. The latter, in Han's opinion, should mean the introduction of the basics of modern science to

the temple schools, as well as study abroad: characteristically, India and China, not Europe, figure as primary destinations. Enthusiastic missionary work, the main “condition for nurturing Buddhism’s strength” in practice, is considered by Han to be also desirable and necessary on purely Buddhist doctrinal grounds as well, as “perfection of the principle of benefiting self and others simultaneously”(chari it’a). And even such an iconoclastic proposal as permitting monks and nuns to marry is defended not only on obvious Social Darwinist grounds(population growth is crucial to the state in the time of “competition between rival races and nations”), but even in a Buddhist way, as “inherently corresponding” to the broadness of Mahayana(as opposed to Hinayana) teachings, especially the doctrine of “artful means”, which allows unconstrained harmony with the needs of time and place for the sake of the “enlightenment” of self and others.<sup>51</sup>

### Conclusion

The comparison between three different way of interpreting and adapting the Social Darwinist doctrines imported through various channels(through American, Japanese, or Chinese interpretations) to the needs of different groups of Korean society shows several important features of the early(1880s ~ 1900s) period of the reception of Social Darwinism in Korea. First of all, as almost all of its intellectual adherents were not scientists, did not have any solid background in science and were primarily concerned with politics or either also religiously motivated, Social Darwinism was not held as an abstract scientific theory independent of mundane concerns. On the contrary, it was basically a “key” to the presumably “adequate” understanding of current historical and political experience, which effectively replaced traditional Neo-Confucian notions of ethical cosmic order and a static Sino-centric world. In as much as the real situation faced by Korea rendered traditional notions obviously completely inadequate, Social Darwinism, its “adequate replacement”, was taken very much as a totalising and all-explaining “truth”. The religious hearts of Christian Yun Ch’iho and Buddhist Han Yongun could bemoan

the “cruelty” of the “disgraceful law of the survival of the fittest” and the present “barbaric” stage of “civilization” as a whole, but did not doubt its “inexorable” nature — at least, for the time being and the foreseeable future. Still, “unconditional surrender” to the “factual truth” of the “inexorable law of survival” was much too shocking for Korean intellectuals, given their Confucian moralistic upbringing and the strong religious (Buddhist, Christian) beliefs of many of them. The “law of survival” not only essentially completely contradicted traditional “moralistic cosmology” and ethics-centred Buddhist or Christian beliefs, but also — unlike metaphysical and speculative religious views — gave too little hope for a visibly weak Korea; in other words, it was too harsh and tough to accept unconditionally and to live with. The way out of this “modern predicament” was somehow to superpose “truth of heart” and “truth of fact” — either to interpret the “law of survival” as essentially and inherently “ethical” or to subordinate it — as just a “temporary rule of the moment” — to the “higher” ethical truth. The former way was, in varying degrees, attempted both by Yun Ch’iho and Han Yongun. While for the former the agreement that “the fittest is also the moral” and “the triumph of might is also triumph of comparative right” came to constitute the central point of his worldview and political philosophy, the latter — even though agreeing that resorting to the superior resources in “competition” is not amoral and the “weaker” is to be blamed — still considered the “barbaric” rules of “competition” a “temporary”, not eternal, truth, eventually to be subordinated to the Buddhist doctrines and ethics (which was predestined to build a better, non-competitive world in the future). For Han Yongun, “the law of competition” was but a temporally limited profane aspect of material reality and the reality as such — just a function of consciousness, the laws of which could be fully explained only in Buddhist context and terms. The differences between these two ways of “domesticating” the “harsh truth” of “competition and struggle” seem to have influenced the political positions of the intellectuals involved as well. Both Yun Ch’iho and Lee Gwangsu — the latter being an important member of Protestant nationalist circles of the 1920s — could not eventu-

ally resist the temptation (of course, combined with repressions, threats, and enticements from the Japanese Government-General) of accepting the military actions of “the fittest” of East Asia — Japan — as morally acceptable and even laudable. The seminal poem of Lee Gwangsu, cited in the beginning of this presentation, shows very well, in articulate literary form, how unmistakably strong was the Social Darwinist admiration of the author for the “right of the might”. Lee’s gradual drift towards Buddhism did not change his intellectual milieu in this respect: Social Darwinist underpinnings were characteristic for the Buddhist circles of the time as well. Perhaps the only exception was Han Yongun, who — on the basis of his initial understanding of Social Darwinist “laws” as temporary limited and axiologically subordinate to the Buddhist ethics — managed to build his own original version of non-violent and Gandhi-inspired Buddhist socialism in the 1930s and to stoically withstand the temptations and pressures, refusing to collaborate with the Japanese to the very end. Han’s case is a very rare example of philosophical “sublation” (in the Hegelian sense of the word) of Social Darwinism on an essentially traditional basis, still very well adopted to modern needs; perhaps, it is to be considered somewhat exceptional. In many cases — as the careers of Yun Ch’iho or Lee Gwangsu typify — Social Darwinist essentials of the world-view were not overcome and led in the end to the acceptance — in various degrees and forms — of the official war-time ideology of the *Japanese Empire built in certain aspects on the same basis*. In other cases, Social Darwinism provided the underpinnings for the formation of the ideology of resistant Korean nationalism that, while having eventually outgrown its Social Darwinist beginnings, retained for a long time easily distinguishable Social Darwinist traits.

## Notes :

- 1 This work was supported by Korea Research Foundation Overseas Korean Studies Grant (grant number: 00-C-04).
- 2 Actually, the same unresolved contradiction between belief in religious altruism and recognition of the role and significance of the “strength” underlies also the ideological construction of Lee Gwangsu’s earlier *magnum opus*, the “Treatise on the National Reconstruction” (*Minjok kaejoron*, 1922). On the one hand, Lee envisions the global aim of the worldwide process of “reconstruction” as “transition from today’s struggle for survival to the future world of international mutual cooperation” and emphasises the “recovery” of Korea’s supposedly “long lost” “basic social ethics” as the key to “national reconstruction”. On the other hand, another important “primeval virtue” of “Korean race” Lee proposes to “recover” and “revive” is “valour and brevity” (*myuyong*); to “recover” it successfully, emphasizes Lee, the building of stadiums in every village, mass physical training and even “better supply of the books on physical culture” are essential. See: *Lee Gwangsu chŏnjip* [Collected Works of Lee Gwangsu], Vol. 17 (Seoul: Samjungdang, 1962), pp. 169~217.
- 3 One of his most notorious paeans to the Japanese Imperial Army, “Hit Americans and British!”, was well timed for the Japanese declaration of war against the USA and Britain, and the conquest of Hong Kong and Manila. The excerpts from this poem show well the degree it was influenced by Social Darwinist racist motives:  
 (“...”) The first thunderbolt of the Imperial Army,  
 Hitting the hipped-up wickedness in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.  
 ‘West Virginia’ and ‘Oklahoma’ –  
 America’s Pacific Fleet is broken to pieces!  
 The consequent strike from land, air and sea in the Southern Seas.  
 British flagship, ‘Prince of Wales’,  
 Is falling down deep into the sea,  
 Taking down the crimes and fate of the Anglos with it.  
 The sacred land of Asia is, from its origins,  
 The land where ten thousand generations of the Heavenly ancestors’ offspring  
 are to prosper!  
 It has been profaned by the Anglo-Saxons’ feet for two centuries,

- But now our Emperor proclaimed the Restoration!”  
 (“The Great Imperial Decree on War Proclaimed”, *Sinsidae*, January 1942).
- 4 On the place of ideas of “self-strengthening” and anticipation of Russian expansion in the thought of one of the best-known progressive Confucian literati, Kang Wi (1820~1884), see: Chu Sūngt’aek, “Kang Wi-ūi kachwa sasang-gwa wegyo hwaltong” [Kang Wi’s Progressive Ideas and Diplomatic Activity], *Han’guk munhwa*, Vol. 12(1991). On the general perception of the Western world as “new variation of the Warring States period” – still unconnected to the idea of international rivalry as “evolutionary mechanism” – see: *Han’guk kūndae kaehwa sasang-gwa kaehwa undong* [Korea’s Modern progressive Ideology and Progressive Movement] (Seoul: Sinsōwŏn, 1998), p. 146.
  - 5 This view is well articulated by Kim Chaehyŏn in the voluminous South Korean official *History of Korea (Hanguk sa)*, edited and published by National History Compilation Committee (Kuksa P’ŏnch’an Wiwŏnhwe): Vol. 45(2000), p. 214, 219.
  - 6 See Rune Svarverud’s article in the present collection.
  - 7 J.R.Pusey, *China and Charles Darwin* (Cambridge: Harvard University press, 1983), p. 189.
  - 8 Kim Tohyŏng, *Taehan chegukki-ūi chŏngch’i sasang yŏn’gu* [The research on the Political ideology of the Great Korean Empire period] (Seoul: Chisik sanŏpsa, 1994), pp. 65~88, 100~108.
  - 9 Pak Sŏngjin, “1920 nyŏndae chŏnban’gi sahwe chinhwaron-ūi pyŏnhyŏng-gwa minjok kaejoron” [The Changes in Social Darwinism of the early 1920s and the Theory of “National Reconstruction”], *Hanminjok undongsa yŏn’gu*, Vol. 17 (1997), pp. 26~32, 40~43.
  - 10 He added: “Private [interests] of oneself, family and clan should be sacrificed for the state’s sake. The state is the basis for private attachments, the highest form of universal love”. Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi heji* [Collected Writings from the Ice-drinker’s Studio] (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1996), *Yinbingshi Zhuanji*, Fascicle 4, p. 17. As modern South Korean researcher, Lee Myŏngju, comments, this passage also signified the rejection of China’s universalistic tradition in favour of the modern Western universe of mutually competing nation-states. See: Lee Myŏngju, “Sinmin iron-e poinūn Yang Kyech’o-ūi yŏksa insik” [Liang Qichao’s Historical Consciousness seen in the “New People” Theory], *Tongyang ch’ŏrhak yŏn’gu*, Vol. 11(1990), p. 198.

- 11 Kim Sŏnghŭi, “Tongnip sŏl” ([On Independence]), - *Taehan Chaganghwe Wŏlbo*, Vol. 7(1907), p. 15.
- 12 See Hŏ Donghyŏn’s article in the present collection.
- 13 Hŏ Donghyŏn, *Yu Giljun nonsosŏn* [Selection of Yu Giljun’s Treatises and Memorials] (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1987), pp. 5~12.
- 14 *Yu Giljun chŏnjip* [Complete Writings of Yu Giljun], Vol. 4(Seoul: Ilchogak, 1971), pp.47~49.
- 15 *Analects of Confucius*, 3:7. Cf. translation by A.Waley: “The Master said, Gentlemen never compete. You will say that in archery they do so. But even then they bow and make way for one another when they are going up to the archery-ground, when they are coming down and at the subsequent drinking-bout.” *The Analects of Confucius*, translated and annotated by A. Waley (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 95.
- 16 See detailed analysis of Yu Giljun’s interpretation of interpersonal competition as a vehicle for promoting personal ethical advancement in: Chang Insŏng, “Yu Giljun-e issŏsŏ-ŭi todŏk-kwa chŏngch’i – chagi, t’aja insik-ŭi chŏngch’ijŏk sayu” ([Yu Giljun’s Ethics and Politics: Political Understanding of Oneself and Others]), - *Han’guk chŏngch’i hakhwe kuwŏl wŏllye palp’omun* [Presentations for the September Monthly Seminar of Political Science Association of Korea](1997), pp. 4~6.
- 17 *Yu Giljun chŏnjip*, Vol. 4, pp. 47~60.
- 18 Yu Yŏngik, *Han’guk kŭnhyŏndaek sa ron* [The Research on Korean Modern and Recent History](Seoul: Ilchogak, 1992), p. 159.
- 19 Yu Giljun, *Sŏyu kyŏnmun* [A Record of Personal Experience in the West] (Seoul: Taeyang sŏjŏk, 1975), p. 231.
- 20 *Yu Giljun chŏnjip*, Vol. 3, p. 10.
- 21 On them, see Rune Svarverud’s article in the present collection.
- 22 Yu Giljun, *Sŏyu kyŏnmun*, p. 84.
- 23 *Yu Giljun chŏnjip*, Vol. 3, pp. 483~484.
- 24 On Katō’s “Samurai Darwinism”, see: Hiroshi Unoura, “Samurai Darwinism: Hiroyuki Katō and the Reception of Darwin’s Theory in Modern Japan from the 1880s to the 1900s”, *History and Anthropology*, Vol. 2(1999), pp. 235~255.
- 25 *Yun Ch’iho ilgi* [Yun Ch’i-ho’s Diary],( Seoul: National History Compilation Committee, 1974), Vol. 2, pp. 418~419.

- 26 Ibid, pp. 388~389.
- 27 Kenneth M. Wells, *New God, New Nation: Protestants and Self-Reconstruction Nationalism in Korea, 1896-1937* (University of Hawaii Press, 1990), pp. 50~63.
- 28 *Yun Ch'i-ho ilgi*, Vol. 3, pp. 228~244.
- 29 *Simmun-üro pon Han'guk pulgyo künhyöndaes sa* [Modern and Recent History of Korean Buddhism seen through the Newspapers] (Seoul: Han'guk pulgyo künhyöndaes sa yön'guhwe, 1999), Vol. 2, pp. 61~62.
- 30 Ibid, pp. 63~64.
- 31 Kim Tohyöng, op. cit., p. 31.
- 32 *Simmun-üro pon Han'guk pulgyo künhyöndaes sa*, Vol. 2, p. 97.
- 33 Ibid, p. 99.
- 34 Ibid, p. 104.
- 35 As Rune Svarverud has mentioned in his contribution.
- 36 Discussed in Rune Svarverud's paper.
- 37 Sin Yongha, *Pak Ŭnsig-üi sahwe sasang yön'gu* [Research on Pak Ŭnsik's Social Thought](Seoul: Seoul National University Publishing Department, 1982), pp. 195~206.
- 38 See also Rune Svarverud's discussion on that treatise in his contribution to the present collection.
- 39 Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi Wenji*, Vol. 10(Taibei, 1959), pp. 44~50.
- 40 Either three realms of *samsāra* (the “desire realm” , the “form realm, and the “formless realm” ), or realms of Heaven, Earth, and Humans in Buddhism. Sanskr. *Triloka*. Synonymous to “all in the Universe” .
- 41 *Sōu*, Vol. 4(March 1907), pp. 40~41. See the original text in: Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi Zhuanji*, Fascicle 2, pp. 45~46.
- 42 *Han Yongun chōnjip* [Complete Works of Han Yongun], Vol. 2(Seoul: Sin'gu munhwasa, 1974), pp. 100~101.
- 43 On similar reinterpretations of nature in Japanese Social-Darwinist thought of the period, see J.A.Thomas, “Naturalizing Nationhood: Ideology and Practice in Early Twentieth-Century Japan”, *Japan's Competing Modernities*, ed. by Sharon A.Minichiello(University of Hawaii Press, 1998), pp. 116~120.
- 44 See also J. Knoblock's translation: “Those who know themselves do not resent others; those who know fate do not resent Heaven. Those who resent others are bound to fail; those who resent Heaven do not learn from experience”.



Knoblock translated *wuzhi* (literally “to have no will”) as “not learn from experience”, following the earlier commentators who had considered *zhi* (“will”) a graphical error of *zhi* (“knowledge”, “experience”). J.Knoblock, *Xunzi. A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol. 1 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 188, 288.

45 Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi Zhuanji*, Fascicle 2, pp. 122~123.

46 Ibid, p. 102.

47 See Rune Svarverud’s paper in the present collection.

48 Ibid, p. 103.

49 As Rune Svarverud mentions in his article in the present collection.

50 Ibid, p. 106.

51 Ibid, p. 119.