

**MODERNIZATION AS A POLITICO-CULTURAL RESPONSE  
AND MODERNITY AS A CULTURAL MIXTURE:  
AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW OF KOREAN MODERNIZATION\***

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*This paper presents an alternative view, an indigenized interpretation, of modernization and modernity from the perspective of the historical experience of Korea. Modernization is conceived as a twin process; first of international acculturation emanating from the initial modernization of the West around the turn of the 16th century; and second, of indigenous adaptive change in each society exposed to it; the former as the converging force and the latter as the divergent process. The nature of the dynamics of indigenous adaptation in each late modernizer society is explained by the Principles of Political and Cultural Selectivity which provide ideas about the interactions among different social forces and selective processes of the existing culture. The end result of this politico-cultural response to the global modernization originating in the West is conceived to be modernity of each non-western modernizing society. Modernity in this sense is a mixture of traditional elements, colonial legacies if relevant, and indigenous effort to adapt to the changing situation, and hence in some respect similar to, and yet in other respects different from Western modernity. The issue of rationality and rationalization, the central theme of Western modernity, is discussed in the context of Korean experience and prospect of change. Finally, some theoretical implications of Yin-Yang dialectics are touched upon for future reflections on the idea of challenge and response in global transformations.*

**Key Words:** *modernization, modernity, political selectivity, cultural selectivity, adaptive change*

The primary purpose of this paper is to present an alternative view of the phenomena of modernization and modernity from the perspective of the historical experience of Korean society. It is to be an alternative to the currently predominant views of modernization and modernity originated in the Western intellectual circles and largely accepted by the non — Western

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academic communities. To illustrate this view, the case of Korea is examined briefly.

The need for alternative discourses in or indigenization of social science from the purviews of non-Western societies has been a subject of serious discussion for some time now and efforts to produce academic works in this line have been made in earnest in certain parts of Asia over the last decade or so. Such pursuits are aimed at overcoming Orientalist mentality and eventually developing culturally independent social and historical science in opposition to what is understood as the mainstream, Euro — American social and historical science.<sup>1</sup>

Considering the importance of indigenization and alternative discourses in social science, a paper of this nature would not be able to do justice to the purpose if any decent yet detailed review is desired. And it should perhaps suffice to state the main objective of this particular work in terms of its specific character that it does provide a different view of the subject matter of modernization and modernity conceived and interpreted on the basis of the unique experience of, say, Korean society, or for that matter any other late modernizer societies around the world. In fact, according to this new theory of modernization, the whole enterprise of indigenization of social science in itself constitutes a form of modernity created by the process of modernization in the so-called Third World outside the West.

In the first part of this work, I am presenting a synopsis of my alternative theory of modernization without referring to all the existing theories. This will be followed by the second section which provides a concise overview of the historical experience of modernization in Korea from the perspective of my own theory of modernization. And finally, I shall discuss the implications of such an effort in view of the future development of human, social, and historical sciences in East Asia and elsewhere outside the West.

## AN ALTERNATIVE THEORY OF MODERNIZATION

### *The Concept of Modernization and Modernity*

To begin with the meaning of the terms, modernization and modernity, I would stress the point that the term “modern” itself needs to be accepted as an invention of European culture and the grand transformation of civilizational scale known as “modernization” is to be understood as an historical process emerged in Western Europe around the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and

<sup>1</sup> For a review of recent efforts in this direction, refer to Alatas (2001) for Southeast Asia and the Arab world, and Kim Kyong-Dong (1996) for Korean sociology.

spread throughout the entire globe ever since. In other words, no matter how the word might have been adopted, translated, and/or used in cultures outside Europe and North America in a later point of time, when the term “modern” was originally selected to denote the broad socio-cultural changes experienced by the early modernizer societies of Western Europe specifically as “modernization,” it already took a life of its own not to be altered or reinterpreted by any other cultures.

In fact, as for the practice of “periodization” of historical eras, up until when the West decided to demarcate the specific period beginning around the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> century as ‘modern’, differentiating it from the previous times marked as medieval and ancient, there had been no society in the world which used this approach to distinguish historical periods. In most societies, histories had been written in terms of the reign of rulers or dynasties. The special demarcation by differential cultural eras, such as modern, medieval, and ancient, therefore, was a cultural invention of the Western intellectual history.

In short, modernization as conceived by the intellectuals of the early modernizing European societies deserves to be recognized as a unique cultural phenomenon of those societies in human history. This holds despite the argument that modernization of the West happens to be combined consequences of certain accidental historical conditions and changes uniquely manifested and taken place in Europe over the centuries, leading to the commencement of transformations we know as modernization today. Modernization of Europe in those days indeed took on very special features quite distinguishable from other eras or other cultures of the world (Chirot, 1994; Goldstone, 2000).

One such special characteristic of modernization initiated in Europe those days was that the changes involved came to move beyond the geographical boundaries of Europe and gradually spread out all over the world. One may call this an “expansionist” tendency of modernization. In many of previous civilizations, such expansionist tendencies were also manifested. However, they were mostly in the form of military conquest and occupation which was terminated after a certain limited span of time. This time, however, the expansion was much more comprehensive and lasting. Modernization has been outreaching spatially all over the globe, culturally covering all the major aspects of human civilization, and temporally still continuing its impact even today. One may attribute this expansionist tendency to the modern capitalist economic system which emerged in modern Europe. No matter, this all-embracing expansion of its own elements to other parts of the world surely is a unique feature of modernization.

The cultural complex created by this process of modernization, then, has been identified as “modernity.” The most essential ingredients usually listed in the package of modernity so conceived would be such typical items as Enlightenment, rationality or rationalization, secularization, the modern state, liberal democracy, modern science and technological innovations culminating in industrialization and information society, modern rational capitalism and its offshoots of whatsoever form, such as division of labor and specialization, Fordism, and the like, the emergence of class and social mobility, psychological mobility, open personality, social-cultural pluralism, and the like, to mention only a few. One could go further in detail and provide a much longer list of elements of modernity. What is important is an image of socio-cultural characteristics represented in this concept of modernity, which seem to differentiate the West from the rest of the world (Chirot, 1986; Harrison, 1988; So, 1990; Giddens *et al.*, 1994; Hall *et al.*, 1996).

#### *The Alternative View from the Other Side of History*

Granted that such are the conventional meanings of the terms under consideration, we may now take an approach from the other side of history of modernization, the side of those societies that came under the influence of modernization originating in the West. The contrast here is between the initiators and followers, early starters and latecomers or late joiners, the providers and recipients, and so on. It is recognized that modernization was a Western invention and that if any other societies had begun changes on their own quite similar in nature and scope to those evidenced in the history of modernization started in the West, still nobody would have called it specifically “modernization.” Then, a natural question would be what did really happen to those non-Western latecomer societies.

The first thing to be noted is that modernization started a world wide process of “international acculturation” due to its expansionist tendency. When the modern western cultures began to spread out to other parts of the world, they came into contact with other cultures affecting them one way or another. Acculturation means changes in cultures that come into contact with other cultures. One notable feature of modernization as a form of international acculturation, however, is that it has been generally “tilted,” skewed, one-sided, or asymmetric.<sup>2</sup>

The modernizing West was in a position to impose its own cultures upon those which came into contact with it. This asymmetry was primarily creat-

<sup>2</sup> This notion of tilted acculturation was suggested earlier by Kim Kyong-Dong (1985).

ed by the relative power of the Western societies with respect to their economic resources, military prowess, technological know-how based on scientific development, and other resources in comparison with those other societies they came into contact. To be noted in this conjunction is that the comparison is not with respect to the relative values of cultures or civilizations of these non-Western societies. It is specifically in terms of certain types of resources, material or non-material. These other societies, therefore, were now placed in the position of having to receive, whether they liked it or not, the incoming western cultures. It is in this context that we now introduce the idea of “adaptive change” and subsequent effort to “indigenize” modernization.

The non-western receiving societies had to decide how they were to meet this challenge of skewed international acculturation imposed by the incoming western powers. They had to make some adaptive change on their own no matter how a weaker position they were in with respect to the imposing western forces. And one could naturally expect to find a great deal of variations in the way each latecomer society adapts to the global tide of modernization. The end result always is some form of indigenization of the process of modernization, and the outcome of this indigenization leaves a unique mode of modernity in each society thus modernized.

To summarize, modernization consists of twin processes of international acculturation and adaptive change, transformations initiated by the West around the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and subsequently spread throughout the world but eventually indigenized by each receiving society (Kim, 1985). Now, in order to help better understand the dynamics of such twin processes from the perspective of the latecomer societies, I shall propose a few principles of social-political-cultural dynamics involving the mode, conditions, and consequences of responses attempted by the receiving societies.

### *The Principle of Political Selectivity*

Probably, the initial response to meet the challenge of adaptation to the changing international situation would have to come from the political sector. Those in power or in the position to make major decisions that may affect the fate of the nation would have to make up their mind as to the following issues:

- 1) whether or not they should open the door to the outside world to meet the surge of acculturation almost imposed upon them by the external forces;
- 2) if so, how they would meet the challenge; or if not, what would be the options;

3) when imposed or coerced to open the door and accept the incoming cultures (as was the case with all the nations and societies that came into contact with the West in the process of global modernization), they should determine (a) how much of (b) what elements of those cultures are to be accepted (c) in what sequence (d) at what pace and possibly (e) to the benefit of which section(s), element(s), or strata of the society.

The whole process of adaptive change entails what I call "political selectivity." Consciously or not, this selective response is inevitably made. At this juncture, however, one should take note of the internal political dynamics of the society in respect with the selective response. This has to do with the nature of the structure of society, especially the power structure, at the moment of the political selection.

The nature and possible consequences of the political response to the outside pressure to adopt the external cultures would be affected by the character of the structure of distribution of resources, particularly power, and the degree to which such structural arrangements could be adjusted and/or altered if necessary. Essentially, the adaptive capacity of the society is at stake. In other words, in a society where the distribution of resources is relatively equitable or at least the extent of concentration of resources is reasonably low, the general attitude of the power elite or those in the decision-making group(s) or strata is relatively open to listen to the demands and grievances of the rest of the population, and as a consequence, the society is relatively well prepared to resolve any major social conflicts and to be open to change if needed, it would be more feasible for the society to make necessary adaptation in the face of the pressure of international acculturation. In short, the degree of flexibility would make a great deal of difference in adaptive effort. This we may call the Principle of Structural Flexibility, as a sub-principle of political selectivity.

### *The Principle of Cultural Selectivity*

When something like adaptive response to the pressure of international acculturation is made, even though the decision is essentially made by the political actors in the political context of the society, they have to draw upon cultural resources available in the society for the selective response they have to make. Culture, in short, supplies the guideline for the adaptive response. As a matter of fact, in the process of adaptation to international acculturation, what really counts is culture, not politics as such. Politics operates merely as a medium to reflect cultural selection. In a sense, therefore, it is culture that makes the selection behind and beneath the political

selection. This then is the essence of the Principle of Cultural Selectivity.

To further elaborate this principle, though, we need to introduce a few additional sub-principles. To begin with, one could argue that a culture which is flexible enough to be open to the challenge from outside and to be relatively open-minded in adopting new elements from outside would be more likely to adapt to the new environment with less trouble than a society with rigid and closed-minded culture. Here we are essentially dealing with the cultural side of structural flexibility, and hence we might name this idea as the Principle of Cultural Flexibility.

No matter how flexible the substance and nature of culture may be, it still would be useful to look into the extent of preparedness on the part of the existing culture to accept foreign cultures. Being prepared implies not merely being open and ready to accept, but also being in a state of having accumulated certain kinds of culture and acquired the capacity which would enable the existing culture to understand, select if needed, and absorb whatever is deemed acceptable and necessary. Thus, it is called the Principle of Cultural Preparedness.

In adopting and absorbing certain kinds of foreign culture, a society's culture must also be somehow in tune with the incoming one. If they clash and find each other completely alien, it would be extremely difficult for the existing culture to comprehend the foreign to begin with and hence to accept and adopt them as part of theirs eventually. I would call this the Principle of Cultural Affinity.

### *The Dynamics of Adaptive Change*

In making adaptive change, various social forces would have to interact to exert influence upon the process. The degree and nature of structural flexibility would play a central role but we might want to examine the features of social dynamics involved more carefully and systematically. Basically, this dynamics may also be characterized as dialectical interaction, as is the case of interaction between societies exposed to each other in the global process of modernization. In short, we could detect double dialectic.

First thing we need to assess is the nature of the system of social stratification and the structure of class formation. This is particularly relevant to the analysis of the selective processes mentioned above, where such structural characteristics will be reflected in the dynamics of interaction by various forces in society equipped with varying amounts of power and resources and with variable interests, cultural vistas and value orientations.

One aspect of this dynamics one might want to focus on is the interaction

between the elite in power and the mass, and the possible part played by the social forces that lie between those two, namely, the lesser elite largely out of power, the intellectuals, and major actors in the economic sector. These forces may in general try to represent their own class interest but also may act as intermediaries between them, sometimes siding with either one of them depending upon the circumstances.

Secondly, parallel to this, the ideological orientations of the society may be scrutinized. Ideology here mainly refers to the system of ideas in the political and religious spheres developed and held by those various forces, affecting the social and cultural life of the people. The relative influence of these ideas would be determined by the relative power of those social forces vis-a-vis other forces. In other words, we notice that political and cultural selectivity is at work in this dynamics.

In the process of adaptive change, then, there could be conflicts among these forces over the issues of opening or closing door to the outside world, accepting or rejecting foreign cultures, and selecting those elements to be absorbed or repelled, and the like, according to their divergent interests and ideological orientations. And depending upon the relative power of the groups or forces, the consequences would vary.

In the process of global modernization of the previous centuries, we have observed that some societies somehow maintained their national sovereignty to a significant degree, others remained autonomous politically but succumbed to the Western imperialists economically, and still others completed colonized. These consequences depended largely on the nature of the structure of society and the dynamics of adaptive change mentioned above.

### *The Meaning of Modernity*

One final point is in order. When we view modernization from the perspective of the late modernizers, as illustrated above, the end result of the process would then be modernity. As has been mentioned in the beginning, many hold the view that modernity is something uniquely western in the very sense that modernization was initiated by the western societies historically, and all other societies adopted it as their model. They further show that there is something essentially modern about the whole social and cultural configurations in terms of several characteristic social, political, economic, and cultural patterns.

To the new alternative view of modernization, modernity is not something already fixed but a dynamically emergent phenomenon. Each late modernizing society, having to go through the complex process of adaptive



change and indigenization, would come up with its own version of modernity which can or cannot be identical to the original version of modernity developed in the West in its process of modernization. The substance of such modernity in the non-western world, therefore, is essentially a form of mixture of the old traditional, the new foreign, and the emergent alternative elements of culture.

At this point, one should note that, since modernization has entailed asymmetrical international acculturation where the western influence has been preponderant, it is almost inevitable for modernity of any non-western late-comer society to resemble, at least in form if not in substance, that of western modernity to some extent. It would, therefore, be easy to mistake modernity of a late-comer society for an exact replica of that of the West. The fact is that, while the late-comers have learned and emulated the western version of modernity in the process of adaptive change, indigenized versions are of necessity different from what they learned from the West. To examine the nature and characteristics of modernity in these societies, therefore, requires very careful scrutiny lest this point may be missed.

#### KOREAN MODERNIZATION: A COMPARATIVE ILLUSTRATION

We are now ready to take a quick look at the nature of modernization experienced by Korean society in the past century or so as an illustrative case of a late modernizer, basically with the theoretical framework presented above as the guiding ideas, not necessarily repeating those ideas in the exposition. In order to provide a comparative purview, it may be useful to approach this task in the context of East Asian modernization. I should make it clear at this point that my synopsis of the historical unfoldings of this region is necessarily very cursory and I shall not be able to do any extensive review of the literature in this particular field, because, first, simply I am not a historian by training, second, it would take much more space even to go over the historical facts in some detail than this paper could assume, and third, this piece of work is intended primarily for theoretical expositions to help understand the nature and special feature of Korean modernization.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For the historical information of Korean modernization and China and Japan as the comparative reference countries, I have relied exclusively on the following materials: Eckert *et al.* (1990); Dolan and Worden (1992); Savada and Shaw (1992); Worden *et al.* (1988); Clyde and Beers (1971); Reischauer and Fairbank (1958); and Bunge (1981).

*The Incipient Modernization under Duress*

Opinions can vary among historians on the exact period, if not dates, of Korea's very first exposure to western cultures. Although China had already established some contact with the West in the thirteenth century, the tide of modernization reached East Asia in the 1500s, and the first Europeans to arrive in China first and then in Japan were Portuguese Jesuits and traders, followed by the Spaniards, the Dutch, the British and the French who later even crossed the borders from China to venture into Korea. In the case of Korea, records indicate that a Confucian scholar of what is known as the Practical Learning School which challenged the orthodox Neo-Confucianism adopted by the ruling elite brought home some documents and gadgets of western origin from China around the turn of the 15th century. This would have to be considered as an *ad hoc* kind of contact rather than a significant case of international acculturation as we understand here.

Korea up till the very end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century used to be depicted by foreign visitors as a typical 'Hermit Nation.' In fact, seclusion, challenge and response may most appropriately represent the salient features of the initial modernization of all three nations of East Asia, but especially Korea. This policy of seclusion was adopted when each of them established a strong centralized dynasty, the Ming (1368-1644) in China, the Choson (1392-1910) in Korea and the Tokugawa regime (1600-1867) in Japan. Doubtless to say, despite such high and stiff wall of isolation, many items of western culture had been incessantly seeped into these societies over the centuries. And yet, the almost insurmountable pressure, military and diplomatic, was mounting in earnest to tear down this wall of exclusion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The political and cultural responses from the three countries of course varied, but in essence, the consequence of the incipient effort to meet the challenge of international acculturation of the western modernization was a successful modernization in Japan symbolized in the form of the Meiji Restoration, but the demise of the Ch'ing Dynasty (1644-1912) in China and the collapse of the Choson in Korea. In the case of Korea, though, there was a slight twist in the process. It was not a birth of a republic like in China or a modernized empire like in Japan. Rather, Korea came to be colonized by the newly modernized imperial Japan, not by a western power of those days.

Simply put, the internal dynamics of power struggle and the consequent political-cultural selectivity and preparedness of the three nations largely determined the nature of responses and their end-results in this process of incipient modernization. In the case of Korea, this internal dynamics mainly involved the power struggle between the ruling elite armed with the almost

defunct orthodox Neo-Confucian ideology and statecraft, with an exclusive monopoly over the resources of the society, and the rest of the social forces. These dissenting forces consisted of the reform-minded elite out of power, influenced by the foreign ideas and cultures as well as the Practical Learning school of Confucianism, intellectuals known as the Eastern Learning School intent on maintaining the traditional elements of culture and yet defying the existing order with strong support from the peasantry, and the broad commoner class utterly dissatisfied by the exploitation and oppression of the corrupt and inept ruling elite.

In the process of severe conflict between these social forces, the ruling elite unable to contain the disorder was forced to solicit a helping hand from the neighboring empires of China, Japan, and even Russia. And the final winner of the game to gain control over the Korean peninsula came to be the Japanese empire. Since the early part of the first decade of the 1900s and 1910 officially, Korean modernization had been carried out strictly under the auspices of Japanese colonial authorities rather than by the autonomous initiative of the Korean people or society, up until liberation in 1945.

In this connection, I should stress at least the following: 1) it was a modernization lacking autonomy of the Korean people, especially in terms of political selectivity; 2) even cultural selectivity was restricted to the extent that Japan deliberately attempted very hard to completely annihilate the legacy of traditional elements of Korean culture, in vain of course; 3) international acculturation entailed a double filtering process in the sense that western cultures were introduced but only through some filtering by the Japanese side of politico-cultural selectivity; 4) the nature of adaptive change was such that Korea had to absorb western cultures already touched and selected by Japanese culture, genuine Japanese cultures of both contemporary and traditional origins, and then place them in juxtaposition with the existing Korean traditions in the face of tenacious resistance from some traditional elements; and 5) the end result of the process, the Korean version modernity during the colonial days, therefore, was a cultural mixture of the traditional, the Japanese which in itself was a mixture of the original Japanese and Western, and the more or less genuine western cultures.

In terms of substance of such modernity, Japan built in Korea certain material and institutional infrastructures necessary for the colonial rule and introduced new ways of life to push for a Japanese style of modernization in Korea. The Japanese also tried to indoctrinate the Korean people to make them true Japanese, culturally, mentally, spiritually, and so forth. In essence, the Japanese colonial legacies have kept affecting social life of the Korean people even after liberation in many respects, some in more subtle ways

than others. One outstanding example of such cultural mixtures is the authoritarian principle of social organization which may have its root in the traditional Confucian heritage to some degree but has been reinforced and somewhat distorted by the militaristic-autocratic-bureaucratic colonial rule of the Japanese.

### *The Uncertain Modernization of the Post-Liberation Period*

Upon liberation from the shackles of Japanese colonial rule, Korea faced an enormous misfortune of national division forced upon it by the two powers of the Cold War era, the United States and the Soviet Union, each occupying the South and North of the peninsula, respectively, originally with the intention of disarming the Japanese army and preparing for nation-building for the independent Korea. It was under such uncertain circumstances that Korea now embarked on the project of modernizing the nation. And the historical consequence of such conditions is what we see now in the peninsula, vastly divergent paths trodden by the two sides of the nation in their pursuit of modernization.<sup>4</sup>

To begin with, the source of international acculturation was different. Korea, for the first time in the history, came to be exposed directly to the West, without any intervention or filtering of a third party country, but the two parts of the nation to entirely different cultures of the USA and the USSR. Wittingly or not, these two post-WWII powers occupying the two sides of the peninsula brought with them divergent cultures to be transplanted in the Korean society. America with its liberal democracy, capitalist market economy, and other attendant cultural ingredients slowly embarked upon the task of nation-building on behalf of the Korean people in the South, whereas Russians immediately installed a Soviet-type regime in the North and pushed this new communist regime to swiftly undertake socialist reforms.

Another crucial difference manifested in this tide of acculturation that had a great deal to do with the divergent modes of adaptive change in the two parts was the degree of openness to the outside world, on the one hand, and the nature of control over the people placed by the new regimes, on the other. North Korea was immediately put under very strict control of the Soviet-type totalitarian system which at once closed the door toward outside except for the communist bloc. This in a sense gave North Korea a chance to maintain a high degree of internal socio-political stability with lit-

<sup>4</sup> For the divergent paths of modernization in the two parts of Korea, refer to Kim and Lee (2003); Savada and Shaw (1992); and Bunge (1981).

tle conflict and cultural integration with little dissent. In the South, openness and relative liberty meant proliferation of political groups with diverse ideological platforms vying for power leading to often violent social conflicts and severe cultural confusion. This sheer anomie in the South, one could even say, may have been a factor contributing to the decision made by the North to wage the war of 'national liberation' by invading the South in 1950.

As for the adaptive efforts on the part of the Korean people in the face of such modes of acculturation, the basic feature may be termed 'uncertainty.' Liberation in itself came as a surprise, the nation was abruptly divided by the outside forces, and the cultures imported or rather imposed upon them were so strange that uncertainty reigned over them in terms of the direction of their nation's destiny. This uncertainty soon was to be quelled in the North mainly because the adaptive change took the form of relatively simple emulation of the Soviet system with a policy of closure toward outside and strict control inside. In the South, on the contrary, confusion ensued in the early part of the post-liberation period and then stability settled in with the installation of an independent state after the model of the American republic in a very crude manner, though.

The emergent modernity of this period between 1945 and 1950, therefore, could be characterized as follows: 1) in the South, a rather confusing fusion of the dynastic legacies, Japanese colonial influences, American political and cultural impacts, and the resulting adaptive indigenization by the Korean people was in the formation; 2) in the North, a Soviet-style system was implanted in the society with still lingering dynastic heritages, Japanese legacies, and the Korean efforts at adaptive indigenization. Details of the contents of such forms of modernity will have to be spared for the sake of space saving.

Then, the Korean War (1950-53) dealt a devastating blow on the initial adaptive changes by the both parts of Korea. On both sides, dependence upon the patron nations of each deepened in the aftermaths of the war, but rehabilitation seemed much more effective in the North with its highly mobilizational mechanisms of a planned economy, while the basically free-market pursuit of interest motivating the political economy of the South left its effort to recover still wandering about pretty much in the dark. South Korea had to wait until the early sixties not only for deliberate effort to recover economically but also to undertake self-propelled modernization.

*The Indigenous Modernization since the 1960s*

The early 1960s saw both South and North Korea embarking on the task of modernization on their own initiative, very interestingly with different justifications.

North Korea made quite remarkable strides in economic growth under the banner of self-reliance. This was done by a very deliberate and methodical political maneuvering on the part of Kim Il-Sung, the political leader of North Korea. In the wake of the Korean War, he undertook two important political tasks, to mobilize the populace to rehabilitate the almost completely destroyed economy and to consolidate his own political power through a series of purges of his political foes. For the sake of the economic recovery, he initially had to rely heavily on both the Soviet Union and communist China. Towards the end of the 1950s, however, North Korea was forced into a position to have to diplomatically distance itself from both of them which came to be entangled in an ideological squabble owing to the detente policy adopted by the Soviets after the death of Stalin. This move in turn caused significant reduction in the economic aid from both. Thus, self-reliance became an inevitable choice for Kim's North Korea. It was under such circumstances he came out with the so-called *Juche* ideology of Self-Reliance.

This self-reliance ideology served not only the purpose of national integration needed to pursue rapid economic recovery and growth but also provided the ideational justification for Kim's unique personality cult which virtually became a civil religion in North Korea. However, adoption of this self-reliance posture which meant to a very large extent almost complete isolation from the outside world became the major cause of the economic demise North Korea came to face in the following decades even way into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Indoctrination, mobilization, and control have been the central mechanisms of maintaining the system intact with the accompanying stagnation in economic, political, and socio-cultural spheres of life.

In the case of South Korea, the struggle for indigenous modernization was ignited by the student upheaval of April 19, 1960, which toppled the Rhee Syng Man regime of the First Republic in the South. The divided and inept Second Republic created after the fall of Rhee was unable to sustain itself in the face of severe socio-political disorder and economic failures, and eventually terminated in 1961 by the coup d'état of General Pak Chung Hee. It was Pak who now in the helm started a very deliberately conceived project of 'Modernization of the Nation.' It is really important to note that the term 'modernization' was clearly adopted by this new military regime, and in fact, it became a central catchphrase for the entire nation in the following

decades. In South Korea, the generation or social forces who led the task of the “Miracle of the Han River” or the remarkable rapid economic growth in the period of the 1960s through the 1980s are often referred to as the ‘generation or forces of modernization.’ And the central elements of this generation happened to be technocrats in the state and corporate sectors and professionals and functional intellectuals who rendered support to them.

In this sense alone, one could call this effort by the Pak regime as the very first attempt by the Korean nation to embark on an indigenous program of modernization, self-conceived and self-propelled by the Koreans themselves without any intervention from outside forces or any uncertainty within the society. International conditions were favorable for this endeavor and the Korean people made the most out of this circumstance by learning, emulating, adopting, and absorbing whatever necessary items, material and cultural, from the international acculturation process they were exposed to. The main source of acculturation, no doubt, was the United States and Japan, and to a much lesser extent some select European countries. In fact, the core forces of technocrats and professionals had their education and training largely in these countries.<sup>5</sup>

Juxtaposed with this generation of modernization is the ‘generation or social forces of democratization.’ This reflects a very significant clash of values in Korean society between ‘the economy first’ and the ‘supremacy of democracy’ in the Korean modernization of the period. As the push for rapid economic achievement by the military regimes left almost all other sectors of society under relatively tight control, during the decades of the 1960s through the 1980s, democratization in the political arena as a potentially central program of modernization was arrested, and the flourishing of civil society at large exceedingly lagged. The apparent imbalance between the unprecedented economic prosperity and the unfulfilled desire for equally noticeable amount of societal liberalization and political democratization has exacerbated the sense of frustration and deprivation among the people.

Inheriting the tradition of protest originated in the April 19 student upheaval, college students came to pose as the vanguard of democratization movements, later supported and/or joined by activist intellectuals, religious figures, labor leaders, and activist women’s groups. Open conflicts inevitably flared up and the regime responded with severe oppression and cooptation rather than peaceful resolution of conflicts, and a vicious circle of more violent resistance from the dissenting forces met by more repressive

<sup>5</sup> This almost exclusive influence from both the U. S. and Japan may be detected in the background of the elite in South Korea. For this argument, see Kim and Lee (2003).

responses from the regime and so on ensued. This process culminated in a massive civil rebellion which eventually led the authoritarian regime to succumb to the demand by the people to liberalize civil society and democratize politics. Free elections were held to make a peaceful regime change a reality, marking the end of authoritarian militaristic rule started in the 1961 coup by General Pak Chung Hee.

The subsequent civilian regimes led by two erstwhile democracy movement leaders, Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung, embarked on ambitious reforms in the political and economic spheres without much success. In their regimes, many from the democracy movement now stepped into the government posts in the main decision-making circles, and they were the zealots who were intent on reforming the apparently *anciens regimes* inherited from the authoritarian period. Despite their effort, they have been engulfed in corruption scandals involving their own clique members and eventually faced the financial crisis causing the drastic measure of bailout by the International Monetary Fund(IMF) which required an overhaul of the corporate and financial institutions in the late 1990s.

The very first new regime of the 21<sup>st</sup> century which came to power through the election of President Roh Moo Hyun in 2002 now is going through a very difficult period of establishing itself as an effective government. The main social force which put him in power and then joined him in the new regime happens to be the relatively younger generation maverick politicians and intellectuals who had fought for democracy in the 1970s and 1980s but had no political or bureaucratic career background. They are naturally very anxious to reform many aspects of social institutions as quickly as possible, but the main sources of their difficulties lie in their apparent amateurism and rather adamant resistance from the so-called generation of modernization with vested interest in the existing system. And South Korea is now facing a formidable task of making the system work for political stabilization, societal integration, and sustained economic growth, which are the main engines for Korea's effort to join the rank of advanced nations in the global stage in the coming decade or so.

I cannot spend any more space beyond this very cursory account of the broad picture of the experience of modernization in Korea. Instead, as a way of characterizing the essential features of Korean modernization, it may be useful to go over the nature of modernity created by such a process of modernization as summarized above.



## MODERNITY KOREAN STYLE

Earlier, I have suggested that modernity means a form of cultural mixture resulting from the experience of modernization in each society. It still retains some traditional elements of the culture to begin with, it then adds the foreign cultures transmitted through international acculturation, and in the dynamic process of interaction of these elements are formed newly emerging cultural mixtures. In this sense, modernity in each society takes on some unique features with certain differences as well as similarities compared with other cases of modernity. This may be said to represent the general picture of modernity in any society, including the West. For the late-modernizers, however, the mixture is rather complex and it cannot be an exact replica of the western version of modernity as emerged and developed in the West.

Since the space limitation does not allow me to detail the substance of modernity found in Korea, let me selectively touch upon only the most significant aspects of Korean modernity as emerged and shaped in the process of modernization, mainly in the political economy and some select aspects of the socio-cultural lifeworld.

South Korea, as it stands at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, looks very much like any democratic capitalist society in its modernity in the sphere of the political economy. The Constitution clearly espouses a republican government with the sovereignty bestowed on the people, all the ingredients of basic human rights stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights firmly installed, and the state constituted with three branches of government separately institutionalized. Representatives of the people are now elected regularly by the direct ballots of the electorate, both on the national and local levels. The press has established itself as a powerful means of expression of opinions and various organizations representing different interest groups and voluntary civic associations flourish. The general populace always can express their demands and grievances in any form provided in the law, including mass protest rallies.

In the private sector, business is run by incorporated corporations and firms of various scales. They compete in the open market under the rules of game promulgated in the legal codes according to which they are to serve the interest of both shareholders and consumers, advertising freely by means of diverse media available. The state provides rules to help the private sector to operate as smoothly as possible, with regulations and controls exercised only when necessary. Legal provisions allow all the stakeholders such as workers, shareholders, and consumers, to express their demands

and grievances, sometimes in mass action like strikes and boycotts, if necessary.

So far so good in the sense that this picture presents a nice rationalized modern democratic polity and a capitalist economy pretty much in the form of what you see in the modern democratic capitalism of the West as if they are its replica. The same logic applies to other sectors of society. The press equipped with all the up-to-date technological gadgets enjoys an enormous degree of freedom of expression and often wields great amount of power in forming public opinion. Civil society has become quite activated and various types of voluntary civil organizations proliferate. Various social institutions are set up in accordance with the western modern rational form.

This surface look, however, should not mislead one to believe that Korean modernity, therefore, is a western type resulted from the general process of modernization. The real picture is much more complicated. True, the political economic system and other social institutions were adopted after the western model, but in the process of modernization, adaptive change was made and indigenization ensued. This is no place to present a detailed picture of this complicated form of cultural mixture and it should suffice to briefly review the traditional elements and other mixtures created in the indigenization process.

### *Traditional Elements*

Perhaps, one of the most outstanding and relatively unique features of traditional nature in the Korean political economy is the patrimonial system of organization and governance.<sup>6</sup> In today's political economy, under the

<sup>6</sup> It would be impossible to describe in detail what patrimonialism stands for, but in essence, it is a form of patriarchal familism transplanted into the political and economic system and culture. The ruler is the patriarch, he virtually owns the state itself, the whole property and the entire populace of the country. Members are obligated to obey the ruler almost absolutely, who then in turn is expected to look after the subjects like the father does in the family. All the subjects are forced to compete for the mercy and special favors of the king, by showing unswerving loyalty to the ruler. For this kind of rule, the ruler builds and relies heavily upon a patrimonial bureaucracy manned with the intellectual elite of the society. In the case of Korea, especially during the last dynastic era of the Choson Dynasty (1392-1910), this elite consisted of the gentry class who enjoyed the privileged status of moral-intellectual elite on the basis of their harsh training in Confucian classics, which provided them with the ground to monopolize the source of authority and legitimacy in state affairs and maintaining social order. Under the patrimonial politico-economic system, the peasantry was severely taxed by the state and exploited by the bureaucratic gentry which did not have to dirty their hands. Mining industry was under strict state control and even handicraft and commerce were not entirely free from the hand of the state. For discussion of patrimonial political culture and system in general, see Weber(1951), and for its application to the case of Korean modernization, refer to Jacobs(1985) and Kim and Lee(2003).

surface of apparent democratic capitalism, the supreme political and business leaders such as the President of the Republic, party bosses, and even corporate CEOs in the private sector are virtually patrimonial rulers in that they wield power, act, and expect to be treated just like the king of the pre-modern dynasty. And one could easily find crossovers of this pattern into other institutional sectors, as well.

The prevalent principles of social organization still effective in Korean society are deeply rooted in the traditional elements of hierarchical authoritarianism, collectivism with a special emphasis on familism, connectionism based on blood relations, locality of origin, attended schools, and other career cohort, personalism stressing emotional involvement and attachment in social relations, and the like. These orientations in combination may have yielded such practices as nepotism, favoritism, cronyism, and the like, which in turn may have contributed to widespread irregularities in business and corruption in public service. In fact, when the financial crisis hit the Korean economy in the late 1990s, many observers outside Korea came to blame these traditional elements as the major factors hindering rationalization of the system. Value orientations placing importance on the respect for authority, especially that of the state and the patriarchal head of organizations, learning and education, discipline and self-control, hard work, and so on, which are often attributed to Confucian teachings, may be affecting the behavior of the Korean people in general even today.

### *Colonial Legacies*

While Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945) did play the role of modernizer for Korea whose initiative was nil under the circumstances, one could say that the nature of the political economy was basically a mixture of colonial, dependent, and exploitive capitalism under a severely repressive rule of Japanese style autocratic-militaristic-bureaucratic-authoritarianism. In addition, for the purpose of effective colonial rule, maintenance of some of the traditional elements of Korea was not entirely undesirable. Japan also introduced a variety of social forms and cultural items from the West in the form of Japanized modernity. Thus, the early mode of modernity created by this passive modernization on the part of Korea already was a cultural mixture of traditional elements, colonial policies, and the western patterns filtered through Japanese adoption and indigenization.

### *Indigenization Effort*

It was only after liberation that Korea was placed in a position to deter-

mine her own mode of modernization. Initially, however, Korea, an unwittingly and forcefully divided nation, was a rather passive modernizer swamped with the surging tide of tilted acculturation almost imposed upon her culture by the occupation forces, the Americans in the South and the Russians in the North. Korea, therefore, had to pass through a phase of relentless adoption and adaptation in the early days of independence and through the war years of the 1950s.

The early 1960s now began to see the earnest emergence within the society of autonomous attempt at indigenous definition of modernization as a national program in terms of the planned economic development. In this connection, we see interesting cases of self-made ideological platforms, for example, in the name of "Guided Capitalism" and "the Korean style democracy." These platforms essentially implied that while the private sector would take care of the chore of production and distribution pretty much in accordance with the market rules, the state would make the most important decisions and virtually 'guide' the economy as the patrimonial ruler. This, therefore, entailed the need for a unique form of governance not necessarily democratic in spirit but in letter only.

In the formation of modernity in this fashion, one could easily detect a very complicated mixture of cultural items taken from the traditional elements, colonial legacies, western patterns, and indigenous adaptation. I cannot detail the substance of such examples here, but you may have no difficulty at all in locating some form of such cultural mixtures in all other institutional sectors of Korean society. Naturally, depending on the sector, different cultural elements from different sources would be combined in the process of indigenization. In this connection, the logic is relatively simple that modernity in contemporary Korea is indeed a complex mixture of these cultural elements, and the same logic could readily be extended to other societies with similar modernization experiences.

What interests me at this final juncture is the issue of 'rationalization' in Weberian sense. How relevant is Weberian rationality to, say, Korean modernity?

### *The Issues of Rationality and Rationalization*

With or without Weber, we know that modernization in the West has meant "the increasing rationalization" of life (Weber, 1970; Hall *et al.*, 1996: 171ff). The main ingredients of this process contained the rise of science and technology, the growth of capitalism as a "rational" form of economic life and system, and the development of a political culture rooted in legal-ratio-

nal laws, rules, and procedures. In the realms of more ideational or spiritual aspects of culture, it represented what Weber referred to as “de-magification or the disenchantment of the world,” which also entailed secularization of culture.

When we apply this reasoning to the case of non-western modernization, once again we encounter a mixture of rationalization in some respects and changes that have little to do with rationality. Thus, the resulting nature of modernity takes on a mixed picture of rationality and things that are either irrelevant or often counter to rationality. In short, modernization is not a linear change yielding a convergent outcome in all societies.

Let us briefly touch upon some of the outstanding features of this mixing process in Korean modernization. To begin with, the science and technology component is definitely there and in some areas, Korean business has been rather successful in catching up with western technologies. But the socio-cultural atmosphere surrounding scientific activities and technological advances, principles of relevant organization, and *modus operandi* of the whole business and politics of science and technology are complex reflections of the traditional elements, colonial legacies, and some unique adaptation of the western forms.

The capitalist form of economy with its management know-how and bureaucratic organizations and the democratic political institutions with all their legal, procedural, and behavioral goodies have been fairly well adopted, and yet their contamination by traditional, colonial, and other peculiarities of the reality of indigenization efforts is undeniable. Owing to the introduction of mass culture *cum* the technological niceties, much of culture in the arts areas resemble those of the West, but the substance that such items carry are unique and different. In the religious sphere, Christianity is considered a western religion (which it is not), and the outward looks of organization, ritual, and scriptures all are look-alikes of any western Christianity. A deep peep into the inside of those churches, messages, and practices would soon reveal that a peculiar form of secularization of religion Korean style, hard to be copied elsewhere, has been created in the process of mixing of various elements involved. The same goes even for other traditional religions which have gone through their own versions of secularization with all the mixtures of modernization.

While rationalization has been achieved in the more mundane and technical spheres of socio-economic life, those non-rational, irrational, and even anti-rational elements of culture have tenaciously intermingled with the rational, in the process of modernization, in the non-western world. Therefore, one could say that if the post-modernist movements in various

areas of social, cultural, and intellectual endeavors in the West is to overcome some of the negative effects of over-rationalization of life in the modernization process, further rationalization in some areas of socio-political and cultural-intellectual life still is an important task of modernization in the late-comer societies, like Korea. This is especially true in view of the extensive globalization that is underway. Not that rationality and rationalization are the requisites of any modernization in any society, but that survival in the ever more competitive world market dominated by the early modernizer world capitalist centers requires such elements for even the late modernizer nations. In this sense, globalization is an extension of modernization, unlike the view espoused by some that globalization finally is replacing modernization(Dirlik, 1999).

#### IN CLOSING

Now, in this closing part, a few words may be in order about the idea of 'response' in laying out my theoretical views on alternative modernization and modernity. Earlier, Toynbee already suggested the notion of challenge and response in the rise of fall of civilizations, and some historians of East Asia, such as Beers, Clyde, Fairbank, and Reischauer have also employed the framework of challenge and response experienced by societies of this region in their modernization process. As a matter of fact, not merely in the case of late comers but also the initial modernization of the West was a response to the challenge encountered by the West through its cultural contact with the East. And as Lenski and Lenski(1987) have aptly put it, the West prior to modernization remained as a 'backwater' of civilizations, relative to the then advanced Eastern civilizations. What is special about the western modernization may be that it spread out in a global scale and has affected every existing society all over the world.

At this juncture, however, one should be reminded that classical thoughts of ancient East Asia are rich with the idea of challenge and response not only in the human social arenas but also in the cosmological order. Particularly significant in this connection is the *Yin-Yang* dialectics. Although I have dealt with this in earlier works(Kim, 1991), this is no place to go into a fuller discussion of the meaning of *Yin-Yang* dialectics and its implications for the theoretical understanding of the dynamics of modernization. At any rate, it would be useful to view the dynamic interaction among nations in the process of modernization as a form of dialectical encounter of *Yin* and *Yang* forces, one positive and the other negative in nature and yet affecting each other in a very delicate manner. This kind of

discourse would not only provide a theoretic view of alternative modernization and modernity, but also it in itself could be an alternative theoretical framework to explain the dynamics of the process of alternative modernization as well as the emergence of alternative modernities as a consequence.

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