1. Introduction

After the opening of Korea’s ports in 1876, modernization plans for establishing a modern nation state were proposed in a wide variety of arguments that removed the scholarly tradition from an understanding of social economic relations. This course of argument came after measures were taken to control pre-1876 peasant uprisings and were reconstituted when beset by the imperialist powers for commerce and trade and for the adoption of Western civilization. Except for the anti-foreign theories (chôksaron) of the central ruling class, Western civilization was generally incorporated in step with the changing times and modernization and enlightenment pursued. However, opinions differed regarding to what degree and from what source these ideas would be adopted.

In the early 1880s, modernization reform projects were carried out through the adoption of Western technology under the aegis of the government. The first theories behind these reform projects were the “theory of Eastern ways Western technologies” (tongdo sôgi ron) followed by the “theory of Western practices” (yangmu ron).

1 Although the theories of these individuals are often categorized as tongdo sôgi ron, this was a general theory that understood and adopted Western civilization from a Confucian perspective, and thus continued this position even as it came into contact with Western civilization (No Taehwan, “19 segi tongdo sôgi ron hyôngsông kwajông yôngu” [A study on the formation process of 19th century tongdo sôgi ron] Ph.D. Dissertation, History Department of Seoul National University, 1999). Furthermore, we need to keep in mind that in the case of China, the theories behind the yangmu and pyônbôp (legal reform) movement all fell under the theory of “Chinese structure Western technology” (Chungch’è sôyong ron) (Min Tugi, “Chungch’è sôyong ron ko,” [A study on the “Chinese structure Western technology” theory] Tongbang hakchi, 18, 1978).
government modernization project adopted enlightenment theories from Japan and initiated Kapsin coup d’état (1884) while simultaneously demanding “independence” from China. They denied the absolute nature of Confucianism and proposed the adoption of Western political theories as well as Western religion. In this respect they stood in opposition to the Min clan forces, Kim Yunsik and Ŭ Yunjung. Generally, according to the theories of the coup leaders of the enlightenment party, the Min forces were considered conservative, while the others could be categorized as the moderate enlightenment faction supporting Kim Yunsik, who were advocates of yangmu reform, whereas Kim Okkyun and his followers could be divided into either a practical enlightenment faction in support of enlightenment through yangmu or pyŏnbŏp (“legal reform”). Of course, though the enlightenment party that led the coup still interpreted modern Western thought vis-à-vis Confucian doctrines and discussed the Meiji restoration from a pyŏnbŏp dimension, their theories were formed under the absolute influence of Fukazawa Yukichi’s enlightenment ideas and thus they turned towards Westernization based on the Meiji reform model. Their reform theory was thus enlightenment theory and not pyŏnbŏp theory from the perspective of Confucianism.

Modern reform theory of pyŏnbŏp type was formed during the Great Han Empire (1897-1910). Kojong, pro-Russian and pro-American forces that were alienated during the Kabo reforms (1894-6) destroyed the Kabo government through Kojong’s flight to the Russian legation (Agwan p’ach’ŏn) and pushed through the Kwangmu reforms in 1897.

Although the reform projects of the Kabo reforms were continued through the leadership of the Kojong, he enacted these reforms under the principle of “keep old
foundations and add the new” (kubon sinch’am) in order to resolve problems raised by the radical nature of the Kabo reforms and their dependence on foreign powers. The pro-American constituents based their enlightenment reform theories on the active adoption of Western civilization, publishing the newspaper The Independent and leading the Independence Association movement. Within such an atmosphere, even conservative Confucian scholars adopted Western enlightenment in the form of a “compromise between old and new studies” based on Confucian concepts and thus broadened public opinion on modernization. While emphasizing change and reform according to the changing circumstances, a principle of pyŏnbŏp theory that was essentially a Confucian political theory, these intellectuals acted as central figures for the newspaper Hwangsŏng sinmun. While supporting industrial development and the promotion of education under the Kwangmu reforms, they advocated the pursuit of autonomy, independence, national wealth and national strength through self-strengthening and self-cultivation.

This paper will examine the Confucian ideas and reform theories of Chang Chiyŏn (1864-1921), one of the modern reformists at this time of the pyŏnbŏp tradition. Chang Chiyŏn has been considered a national spokesman because of one essay that he wrote in opposition to the � sty treaty (1876 Kanghwa treaty) titled “Today we open our throats and wail.” In addition to active discussion, there has been much research to date on the kyemong enlightenment movement, reform thought and historiography.\(^2\) Despite this fact, this paper seeks to reexamine the thought of Chang Chiyŏn for the following reasons.

\(^2\) Representative of this is Ch’ŏn Kwanu et al, “Wiam Chang Chiyŏn ŭi sasang kwa hwaltong” [The Thought and Activities of Chang Chiyŏn, pen name Wiam], 1993.
First, through Chang Chiyŏn, I want to show that that there is a difference between the shifts in thought of Confucian literati and the enlightenment theories that maintained the traditions of pyŏnbŏp reformists. Most of the existing research interprets the modern reform movement by focusing on the “enlightenment party” (kaehwa p’a) and labels all the people who participated in the independence movement or the kyemong enlightenment movement as falling under either “enlightenment thought” or enlightenment self-strengthening thought”. However, the theoretical framework of pyŏnbŏp was different from enlightenment thought from the very outset, based as it was on the Confucian pyŏnt’ong theory (“reform the customs”) to which they applied ideas of Western civilization and attempted to correct the abuses of Confucianism. These theorists criticized the “enlightenment” of the enlightenment party and instead discussed the Confucian meanings of “enlightenment”. In this respect, various reform theories of different scholarly origins and reform ideas were combined under the Independence Association movement and kyemong enlightenment movement.

Having combined various scholarly orders, the kyemong enlightenment movement again split into several different branches around the time of Japanese colonization in 1910. Under this movement, the various groups that had adhered to theories of skill cultivation divided into branches—some headed towards a course that advocated an independence war or armed resistance, while one group turned into a pro-Japanese party.³ Among the pyŏnbŏp theorists, Pak Õnsik and Sin Ch’aeho sought political asylum abroad and joined the overseas independence resistance while Chang Chiyŏn remained behind and supported Japanese colonial rule, taking on a pro-Japanese stance. Although Chang

³ Kim Tohyŏng, Taehan chegukki ǔ chŏngch’i sasang yŏngu [A Study on the Political Thought of the Great Han Empire Period], 1994, pp. 372-425.
Chiyŏn’s downfall first began with his inability to break out of a social Darwinist paradigm, it also appears to be related to the fact that, unlike Sin Ch’aeho, he continued to hold onto Confucian dialectic. This is another issue that will be addressed in this examination of Chang Chiyŏn.

2. The formation pyŏnbŏp reform theories

Chang Chiyŏn received his education as a typical local Confucian scholar. Born in Sangju, in 1877 at age fourteen he went to study the Confucian classics under Chang Sŏkpong of Chilgok in Osan. The Indong Chang clan of this area carried on the scholarly traditions of Chang Hyŏng’gwang, a Confucian scholar of the mid-Chosŏn dynasty, and had occupied high official positions. Upon Chang Sŏkpong’s death in 1882, Chang Chiyŏn continued studying the classics from Hŏ Hun in Kumi, a neighboring town in Imŭn. Hŏ Hun was the student disciple of Hŏ Chŏn, who in turn carried on the sirhak (“practical learning”) ideas of Yi Ik. Although at the Hŏ household, they associated early on with members of the namin (Southerner faction) of the Kiho region, it was not until Hŏ Chŏn left for his post as the magistrate of Kimhae that Hŏ Hun became Hŏ Chŏn’s disciple. Of course, though Hŏ Hun did not blindly accept Hŏ Chŏn’s samjŏng strategy (reform of the three administrative branches: land allocation, military service, grain loan system) or the land reform theories proposed as measures for subduing peasant uprisings, he still thought highly of his teacher. During a period of intellectual development, Chang Chiyŏn was familiarized with the Confucian thought of the Southerners faction

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4 This region was comprised of Kyŏnggi, Southern Hwanghae, and Northern Ch’ungch’ŏng provinces.
5 For more on the Chang and Hŏ family households, see Kim Tohyong, “Hanmal-Ilche sigi Kumi chiyŏk yusaeng ch’ŏng útil tonghyang” [Trends within the Confucian scholar class of the Kumi region during the late Han and Japanese colonial period] Hanguk hak nonjip [Collected Essays on Korean Studies] 24, Kyemyŏngdae Hanguk hak yŏnguwŏn, 1977.
from the Yŏngnam region in addition to sirhak studies. However, associating mainly with members of the Chang family, he then applied to sit for the licentiate examinations several times in order to become a government official, thereby following the usual path of Confucian literati.

Chang Chiyŏn underwent an intellectual shift around 1897. He was first seriously introduced to elements of Western civilization through the newspaper The Independent or the Independence Association at a time when the Kwangmu reforms (1897) were being enacted. In particular, he attempted a compromise with the old system under the Kwangmu reforms by pointing out the weakening of royal power because of the radical nature of the Kabo reforms. This was the reform theory known as kubon sinch’am. Such shifts had an influence on the Confucian literati class, including Chang Chiyŏn as well.

After King Kojong’s flight to the Russian legation, Chang Chiyŏn wrote a memorial to the king at the Russian embassy requesting his return to the royal palace and also requested that upon his return he promote himself to the position of emperor. Proclaiming an empire and promoting Kojong to emperor was not simply adherence to Western customs but rather an effort to maintain the principles of the country by complying with the Heavenly mandate for the ruling elite while also satisfying the will of the common people, in the belief that this would enable the beginning of their independence and rehabilitation of the country.6 Meanwhile, he insisted that this new learning should be adjusted to a foundation of Confucian learning. In his 1897 “letter to the government,” he stated that although “the five Confucian virtues (oryun) are eternal and unchangeable principles throughout the world, various laws and institutions should

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change according to the times.\textsuperscript{7} The pyŏnt’ong and pyŏnbŏp theories thus argued that although Confucian principles were unchangeable other social systems or elements must necessarily change.\textsuperscript{8}

The people who were pursuing modernization from a Confucian perspective had gathered together under the newspaper, Hwangsonsinmun. After Chang Chiyŏn also became editor-in-chief of this newspaper in September of 1899, he continued to be active as its president until March 1906. The Hwangsonsinmun was founded “in order to introduce new elements to an old foundation.” This was proposed after it was determined that the reform projects of the “those seeking new things” or the enlightenment forces had gone awry. The latter, who had adopted the tenets of Western civilization having only seen its prosperity, were called “agitators” because they changed the legal system to eliminate corruption only to breed further corruption. Accordingly, although Western laws also had to be adopted as a matter of course for the enrichment of the nation and strengthening of the people, pyŏnbŏp advocates claimed that old ways should be discarded with discretion.\textsuperscript{9}

Therefore the Hwangsongsinmun stressed pyŏnt’ong and discussed enlightenment in terms of Confucian logic. Enlightenment was where they “opened up to a myriad of things, achieve results, and establish customs through the education of the people” and its fundamental meaning lay in “change befitting the times.”\textsuperscript{10} According to them, enlightenment was already something that had been achieved in the East through

\textsuperscript{7} Wiam mungo, vol. 3., “Sang chŏngbu sŏ [Letter to the government]” chŏngyu (1897) p. 104.
\textsuperscript{8} When Confucian scholars needed to reform society, they always relied upon the concept of pyŏnt’ong, a Confucian political theory, to suggest reforms and legal change. For a review of such trends since the latter half of the Chosŏn dynasty, see Kim Chunsŏk, “Yangnangi ŭi kukka chaejo munje” [Issues regarding national reconstruction during the period of double uprisings], Hanguksa yŏngu [A study of Korean history], 101, 1998.
\textsuperscript{9} Hwangsongsinmun, April 29, 1904; September 22, 1899; September 7, 1898; March 3, 1899.
\textsuperscript{10} Hwangsongsinmun, December 14, 1901; September 7, 1900.
the Confucian culture or within our political history. Thus at that time, what was considered enlightenment must have been from this position, the basis of which was none other than the principles of Confucianism.

Even today, the five moral relationships are still firmly observed and if we understand the truth of people then it is the enlightenment of one’s conduct. If we are to correct the principles through an exhaustive investigation of our scholarship then this is the enlightenment of scholarship. If we are to make the politics of the nation fair and allow the people the joys of peace then this is the enlightenment of government. If we add such various items together, then this can be said to be a complete enlightenment. However, the enlightenment of conduct is the same for all countries throughout the world. It is something that remains unchanged despite the ten thousands of years it has been passed down, and all enlightenment including that of politics, can change according to the times, be rectified, and also can differ according to region…

In short, although morals, scholarship, politics, laws, and tools must be obtained in order to have enlightenment, except for the fundamental Confucian principles, all else should be changed and adjusted according to the time and region, at which point both their shortcomings and benefits need to be considered.

When it is said that the ever changing pyŏnt’ong is a basic characteristic of “understanding the principle of all things and educating the people,” this is ultimately actualized through pyŏnbŏp befitting the time and region. Abuses emerge when laws become old and if they do not change, these abuses accumulate. Domestically, therefore, these abuses must be eliminated while internationally legal reform is the only way of escaping the contempt of other countries. Like pyŏnjang (“reform”) and yusin (“restoration”), pyŏnbŏp was a reform process imbued with a Confucian overtone. They were convinced that “in order to plan a politics of restoration, they first had to reform

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11 Hwangsŏng sinmun, September 23, 1898. This argument has been taken directly from Yu Kilchun’s Soyu kyŏnmun [Observations from Travels in the West]. Although Yu Kilchun fled to Japan because of the collapse of the Kabo reforms, this book continued to be used for government reform projects of the Great Han empire. (Hwangsŏng sinmun, October 2, November 5, 1898)
state laws, and after clearly establishing these legal systems, they had to be enforced as
the standard.” In this respect, though they viewed the Kabo reforms as the beginning of
pyŏnbŏp and yusin, they thought it was a pity that these reforms were not adequately
carried out. The institution of Japanese government institutions and regulations under the
Kabo reforms was merely imitation without considering both potential advantages and
disadvantages, and although they broadly established government institutions and
corrected laws, nothing was actually executed and abuses arose from revising
government institutions and laws in a single day. These points suggest that these later
reformers had placed high expectations on the many legal revisions attempted by the
Great Han Empire.12

They discussed popular rights from within their pyŏnbŏp theories and went so far
as to envision reform towards modern political institutions. Even their understanding of
the popular rights issue was based on a Confucian concept wherein “the people are the
foundation of the land.” Countries with a parliamentary system that also practiced this
concept were civilized, wealthy and strong, while countries without a parliamentary
system were inferior, weak and impoverished. They also stressed that citizens do not
have to be oppressed or mistreated by governments or those in power but rather held the
natural rights of all men to preserve their lives and property. Citizens were not there for
the sake of government but government was established for the sake of the citizens, and
outside of their authority, a government could not encroach even an inch upon the rights
of its citizens.13

12 Ibid., January 17, 1899; March 22, 1904; March 3, 1900; July 21, 1899.
13 Ibid., February 22, 1899; May 7, 1900; October 21, 1898; October 1, 1898.
While acting as the chief editor and president of the *Hwangsŏng sinmun*, Chang Chiyŏn proposed numerous articles of reform. Generally, he was critical of the poor progress made by the reform projects of the Great Han Empire and the many abuses that they generated. In particular, he discussed Chang To, Kim Sangyŏn et al. and their “55 article political reforms” presented to the Privy Council.\(^\text{14}\) Although these reform articles were extensive reforms of maladministration beginning with political institutions, at the core of which was the Great Han Empire, a nation governed by an emperor with the ruling power, he proposed the separation of powers in the administration of the government and physical freedom, as well as freedom of life, speech, assembly, association, and religion for all citizens. In other words, these political reforms supported the Great Han empire’s pursuit of modern reforms through policies for increased production and education, while also adopting the modern reform theories from a *pyŏnbŏp* perspective by strengthening the authority of the State Council, expanding popular rights, expanding the private legal system, and revitalizing the Privy Council.

In this manner, the Confucian reformers including Chang Chiyŏn turned towards modern reforms from a position of Confucian *pyŏnbŏp* theory. *Pyŏnbŏp* theory, which emphasized compromise with new Western learning, differed from the intellectual roots of civilization and enlightenment theories central to *The Independent*. As enlightenment theories moved towards Westernization, they sought out modern Western thought, such as Catholicism, whereas *pyŏnbŏp* theories sought out late Chosŏn *sirhak* thought as the theoretical basis for resolving contemporary social problems. They decided that the impoverishment of the country and people was due to a failure to accept *sirhak* scholarship at that time and their inability to implement it, demonstrating a specific

interest in the social economic and historical theories of sirhak. Even among the sirhak scholars, they considered their guidelines to be the ideas of Yu Hyŏngwŏn, Yi Ik, Chŏng Yagyŏng, Pak Chiwŏn for resolving their contemporary social problems. When Chang Chiyŏn became editor of the Kwangmunsa, a later version of the Sisa ch‘ongbo, he published at that time Chŏng Yagyŏng’s Mongmin simsŏ [A Guide to Governing the People] and the Hŭmhm sinsŏ [Toward a New Jurisprudence], supplemented the Abang kangyŏk ko [Historical Geography of Korea] and then compiled it as the Taehan kangyŏk ko [Historical Geography of the Great Han Empire] in 1903. He assessed that “[Chŏng Yagyŏng] wanted this to be the timber that would make it possible to manage the world and save the times, and his thorough scholarly knowledge has accumulated to the point that his erudition of the past survives even to the present, always with a sense of reform and restoration, which unfortunately we have not had the opportunity to implement.” In this regard, the scholarship of Chang Chiyŏn is considered to have been largely influenced by Chŏng Yagyŏng and Yi Ik.

3. Self-strengthening and participation in the kyemong enlightenment movement

Chang Chiyŏn left the Hwangsŏng sinmun in February of 1906 and organized the Great Han self-strengthening society (Taehan chagang hoe) with Yun Hyojŏng and others that March. In the understanding that “hitherto we, the Great Han, have not studied self-strengthening technology and thus our citizens, left to themselves, have

15 Ibid., May 19, 1902.
16 Chang Chiyŏn even made the mistake of supplementing the Wibang ilbon pu [Japanese department of defense], to which Chŏng Yagyŏng had never even referred. Of this, one portion was published in the Hwangsŏng sinmun, April 14-May 8, 1903.
become ignorant and our national powers have dissipated, until we eventually arrived at our present ordeal and have come under the protection of foreigners,” they formed this society in order to recover Korea’s power through self-strengthening.19 The pyŏnbŏp theorists, including Chang Chiyŏn, had continuously pressed for self-strengthening though the Hwangsŏng sinmun and had participated actively in the enlightenment movement while adopting the legal reform and self-strengthening theories of Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, leaders of the Chinese legal reform movement. While still remaining active in the State Council, Chang Chiyŏn also proposed strategies for the pyŏnbŏp movement under the Great Han self-strengthening society.

Chang Chiyŏn proposed self-strengthening ideology vis-à-vis enlightenment movement theories. He, like other intellectuals at the time, was also influenced by Darwin’s theory of social evolution. According to this, the competition for existence known as “the survival of the fittest” were laws decided by the heavens and in the midst of such competition, and an insignificant Korea must pursue self-strengthening ideology by taking as law the idea “strengthen the self unceasingly” from the Book of Changes.20

Chang Chiyŏn’s self-strengthening theories were in response to developments in the reform movement after the opening of Korea’s ports. He opposed the tonghak (eastern learning) ideas of the peasant class which he blamed for the closed door policy and national ruin, and was critical of the movement led by the enlightenment party that advocated total renovation. In particular, although the Kapsin coup d’état (1884) emerged out of a progressive reform, he thought that it was impetuous, rash, radical and

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19 Taehan chagang hoe, “Taehan chagang hoe ch’wiji sŏ” [Prospectus for the Great Han self-strengthening society], Taehan chagang hoe wŏrbo [Monthly report of the Great Han self-strengthening society], 1, 1906.
20 Chang Chiyŏn, “Chagang chuŭi” [Self-strengthening ideology], Taehan chagang hoe wŏrbo, pp. 3-4; “Kukka pinyak chi ko” [Reason for the poverty and weakness of our nation], Taehan chagang hoe wŏrbo, pp. 6-7 (Chang’s name is omitted from the remaining writings).
only served to deepen our service to foreign powers. He further thought that although the Kabo reforms retooled its outward appearance by emphasizing restoration and reform of the entire political and legal system, it still failed because of its radical character. Even the Independence Association movement publicly declared that the foundation of independence should be the popular rights and the patriotism of its citizens, yet also indicated that radicalism was a mistake. In other words, the enlightenment party reform movement was viewed negatively as being dependent on foreign powers and too radical in nature.

The self-strengthening measures proposed by Chang Chiyŏn can be categorized as the following. First, he emphasized organization and solidarity of the group. He believed that the survival of the fittest depended on the ability or inability of the group, but that Korea at the time had no group solidarity because of factionalism, contemporary circumstances, dependency, indolence, and a lack of theories for the nation. Although he generally pointed to these reasons to explain the lack of national characteristics, he also argued that citizens were unaware of their responsibilities because of a lack of patriotism and public ideology which prevented group solidarity. He therefore stated that the time when they would have solidarity through self-strengthening is “the day that the Great Han self-strengthens independently.”

Next, he argued for promoting education and developing industry. He even suggested that this was central to the pursuits of the reform projects of the Great Han empire and the Great Han self-strengthening society. Needless to say, Chang argued this

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21 “Kwagŏ ūi changhwang” [The shape of the past], Taehan chagang hoe wŏrbo, 11.
from the perspective of “enlightenment”. Because there were insufficient material resources to propel this forward, he suggested that they enact it through their nonmaterial intellectual resources. Members researched strategies for developing education in terms of the connection between education and government schools and proposed these strategies to the authorities, suggesting that they link private education to the government system throughout the country and saying that the government itself must direct and promote it. In addition, they should gather specialists together to advise the government on their strategies for promoting production and while researching measures for bringing wasteland under cultivation, developing forestlands, and promoting agriculture, they should simultaneously discuss the protection of private property.\(^{23}\)

Chang Chiyŏn also stressed the importance of patriotism for self-strengthening. His was like the statement made by the self-strengthening society that “Our urgent task in these current circumstances is internally to cultivate the spirit of our fatherland and externally to take in the scholarship of enlightened civilization.”\(^{24}\) Chang focused on history and geography as a means of arousing patriotism. Saying that “We have to teach our country’s history from the very outset of education in order to awaken the spirit of our fatherland, inspire our sense as a nation of people, cultivate patriotism, and galvanize our mental strength,” he also said that “4,000 years of our country’s spirit” can be found in our geography.\(^{25}\)

Chang’s criticism of Confucianism and Confucian scholars who would not accommodate the changing circumstances was also another aspect of his self-

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\(^{23}\) “Chagang hoe mundap”, Taehan chagang hoe wŏrbo, 2, pp. 7-8.

\(^{24}\) Taehan chagang hoe, “Taehan chagang hoe ch’wiji sŏ”, Taehan chagang hoe wŏrbo, 1, p. 10.

strengthening ideology. Blaming the corruption of Sinocentrism for the loss of national power at that time, he denounced “those who eat and play, consuming all the resources,” saying that the class of corrupt officials who held high government positions for generations, families and children of the houses in power, and literati who study the classics are “in fact great rats that are consuming our country and great parasites that are hurting our people.” Therefore, according to the principles of pyōnt’ong wherein even the literati should change with the times, he insisted that they must adopt new Western learning.

Pyōnbōp theorists all criticized the literati who they felt would not change because they lacked knowledge of contemporary changes and thus called for the reform of Confucianism. They suggested reforming Confucianism in a religious dimension perhaps using Pak Unsik’s “Yugyo kusin ron” [Theory on renewing Confucianism]. They stated that they actively had to expand the spirit of Confucianism throughout popular society by continuing the scholarly traditions of Mencius and studying the simple and easy Wang Yangming learning instead of the boring and difficult learning of Chu Hsi. In pursuit of a reform of Confucianism itself and intending to transform it into a religion, they established Taedonggyo [The Religion of the Great Unity] in September 1909.

Taedonggyo was based on the ideas of “great unity” found within Confucianism. Having been influenced by Kang Youwei’s theory of the “great unity” (Datongshu), these individuals did not focus on training coming generations in Confucian morality or study the theory of the “great unity” vis-à-vis its counter-position to Confucius’s quest to save the world, but instead pointed out that since they had strayed from the nation and

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26 “Chagang chuúi,” Taehan chagang hoe wórbó, 3; “Kukka pinyak chi ko” Taehan chagang hoe wórbó, pp. 7-8.
internationalism, they should adopt the study of the “great unity” in order to save the
world.27 In this regard, Pak Únsik, the religious head of Taedonggyo, defined it as
something through which “humaneness can be restored and together all people under the
heavens can possess the fortunes of great peace,” noting that herein lies the meaning of
the sages for administrating the world.28

Chang was the head editor for Taedonggyo. While calling these times a period of
religious reform that revered and reformed the Confucian religion, he called Taedonggyo
“a great religion for all eternity” that befitted the times and wanted to save the masses of
the world through progress and equality.29 In order to disseminate Taedonggyo as a
religion, they translated into Korean vernacular the worthy writings and anecdotes found
in Confucian doctrines as well as the books newly produced by Taedonggyo. Thus
leading the citizens to believe, they also planned to propagate this to China, Japan and, of
course, Western academia through the translation of such books into classical Chinese or
English.30

Chang Chiyŏn’s self-strengthening ideology was an outgrowth of the pyŏnt’ong
and pyŏnbŏp theories discussed in the Hwangsŏng sinmun, proposed from within the
realities of having to accept social Darwinism and the loss of national authority. To
achieve self-strengthening, he promoted education and industrial development as well as
national spirit through the formation of groups. He criticized Confucian literati who
failed to reform their traditions and planned to transform Confucianism into a religion. In

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27 Hwangsŏng sinmun, April 16, 1909; Hwang Sŏngja, “Taedonghak sŏl ŭi mundap” [Dialogue on the
writings of Taedonghak], Kiho hāng hakhoe wŏrbo [Monthly report on the emergent scholarly associations
of the Kiho region], 10.
28 Pak Únsik chŏnsŏ [The complete writings of Pak Únsik], vol. 2, pp. 59-60.
29 Wiam mungo, vol. 6, “Taedonggyo yok hoe ch’wijimun” [The mission statement for the society to
propagate Taedonggyo].
this regard, he believed that if they were to be strong and powerful through his self-strengthening ideology, then they had to compete in the survival of the fittest while simultaneously pursuing it gradually over many subsequent generations. This was none other than the theory of cultivating practical skills (silyŏk yangsŏng ron) towards which the enlightenment movement had been turning by this time.

4. The distortion of self-strengthening ideology and a theory for promoting Confucianism in the 1910s

After Japanese colonization, Chang Chiyŏn, a fervent nationalist, gradually began to change his outlook on reality. Constantly unable to abandon a social Darwinist position, he praised Japan’s advances in enlightenment, its national wealth and strength while viewing in contrast Chosŏn’s barbarism, immaturity, and collapse. He decided that Chosŏn’s colonization was an inevitability considering military strengths and weaknesses and the enlightenment competition for survival, and thought of Japan as the “hegemon of the East” and the “Eastern pioneers”. He thus came to advocate an Asian ideology in preparation against a Western invasion of the East where the peoples of Asia must stand united with Japan at the lead.

Chang understood that Japan had achieved enlightenment through the adoption of Western civilization. In other words, he stated:

Having been awakened early, about 40 to 50 years before, to the idea that Western newspapers had material benefits and practical uses, renowned figures [of Japan] traveled far to several countries in the West, attending classes while abroad. They received training in each factory, acquiring ingenious technology that they researched further. After returning home, they built factories and experimented with them so that they could actually be operated. Through such a means, Japan’s machine industry was all learned from the ingenious Western

technology which they ultimately established as the basis of their wealth and power so that they realized their current prosperity.

These educational methods which followed behind those of Europe and America were imported, modified by Japanese scholars who absorbed in a day the enlightened learning that the Westerners had acquired after hundreds of years, exhausting all their strength in working assiduously for the sake of gradual progress. In no more that ten years they were gradually able to stand shoulder to shoulder with the West, and their speed of progress towards enlightenment was something miraculous.32

Having actively adopted military and weapons technology from the West, Japan achieved enlightenment within a short time and were able to dominate Asia at a speed that was even faster than that of the West.

From such a perspective, Chang Chi’yŏn thought that the enlightenment of Chosŏn would be possible only if it were learned from Japan and followed behind them. After the opening of the ports, Chosŏn went with Japan to Europe and America to learn the industrial arts. Chang Chi’yŏn felt it was a shame that if they had been able to set up a system of education then they may have been able to surpass even Japan in the development of wealth, power and enlightenment, but he now viewed that their only choice was to adopt new Western learning simply in order to follow Japan.

Nevertheless, Chang did not agree with a direct adoption of the Western learning model. He continued to adhere to his own modern reform theories conceived from a Confucian platform. Although he believed in the need for the adoption of Western learning for the sake of enlightenment, he criticized the mistake of the rising new forces who neglected Confucian principles in pursuit of enlightenment at the time, as well as the “mistaken literati” who were carelessly adopting Western learning.33 In other words, he

32 Chang Chi’yŏn chŏnsŏ [The complete writings of Chang Chi’yŏn] 8, Dangook University, East Asian Studies Research Center, p. 83.
33 Ibid., 8, pp. 15-16.
proposed a theory of compromise between traditional and new learning wherein Confucianism was reformed and promoted together with the adoption of new learning.

Calling Confucianism “the great way that enables the governing of the world and the administration of states,” Chang stated that:

In general, the great way of our Confucianism is that it changes according to the times. If however, we only preserve ancient ways and claim not to know how to change traditions, how can we say that that this is the way of practicing Confucianism? . . . If we call ourselves Confucian scholars while not being able to apply this in the world how can we say this falls under Confucianism?

He expected them to adhere to the concept of pyŏnt’ong, a fundamental Confucian principle, and become Confucian scholars who apply these concepts to the greater world. The situation at the time was not like this however. Civilization had developed for a long time in the East since the advent of writing, and though they reached a high level of enlightenment and progress, over the years that passed, classical studies (philosophy, natural sciences, literature and politics) naturally had become corrupted while new studies in the modern Western sciences that had practical applications were developing increasingly such as physics, chemistry, industrial arts, mining, agriculture, machinery and tools. Despite the fact that Western learning was originally quite limited compared to the East, since they began to pursue more practical knowledge several centuries earlier, science developed and industry flourished, leading to their enlightenment, wealth and power.

In the end, the corruption of classical studies and Chosŏn’s marginalization through the new learning were due to the mistakes of the Confucian literati. They were unable to depart from a cliquish attitude that came from the literati purges and factions of

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34 Ibid., 8, p. 211.
36 Ibid., 8, pp. 77-78.
the Chosŏn dynasty while the decrepit literati who did not understand the principles of pyŏnt’ong were mired in doctrinairism and thus marginalized the new learning of the West. Chang Chiyon denounced these literati for “not understanding the situation nor conforming in a timely manner, and not contributing to the times nor benefiting the state,” and although these literati call themselves disciples of Confucius, he actually defined them as “shams.” He truly believed that even if Confucius or Mencius were to reborn they would have acted according to the changes taking place in the world.37

Consequently, Chang demanded that they promote classical studies in a way that reflected the times, reforming them and at the same time adopting Western technological advances. He stated:

Though the manner of practicing politics through industry and trade and basing it on wealth and power is wrong, and the actual foundation of civilization lay in ethics, morality, literature and laws until 5,000 years of learning in Asia became corrupted and reached its zenith, ultimately the most essential aspect of politics is to make it suitable to the contemporary world by promotion and reform, and thus it would not be right to abolish it.38

He supported the idea of reforming and promoting classical studies such as ethics, morality, literature, laws in conjunction with the development of industry and trade in order to achieve wealth and power, which he called “the great fundamental principle of politics.” He limited the new learning to be adopted to technology and his attempt to resolve legal problems through the reform of classical studies imparted a retrogressive aspect to his pyŏnbŏp theory through its resemblance to yangmu forms. In particular, the five principles of Confucianism was to him absolutely unwavering truths throughout all time and space.39

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37 Ibid., 8, pp. 50-51; 115-116; 15; 212.
38 Ibid., 8, p. 79
39 Ibid., 8, pp. 51-52.
Because of such an attitude, Chang was very open even towards the “promotion of Confucianism” advocated by Government-General policies under colonial rule. In other words, he thought “it was to the utmost that since enacting sinjŏng (‘new government’ or Government-General) they have developed Confucianism on behalf of the literati world by keeping the Sŏnggyungwan [National Confucian Academy], increasing its number of officials and lecturers according to the traditional system, and clearing up its finances; the authorities thus stimulated scholarship, elevated Confucianism, and made it successful.”

Chang Chiyŏn was later introduced to literati who practiced genuine Confucianism and became absorbed in their reorganization of history. While serializing “Chosŏn Yugyo yŏnwŏn” [The origins of Chosŏn Confucianism] in the newspaper Maeil sinbo, he reasserted that Chosŏn’s collapse was not due to Confucianism but to an inability to disseminate the correct Confucianism, particularly because as the political scene shifted to factionalism, false Confucians shamelessly deceived the King without.41 Within a social reality where only the great lineages were highly revered, he gathered together all figures of the past, such as their pitiable ancestors or heroes who were unable to rise to prominence in the world, people of common or mean stock who could not serve as government officials, and figures from the northwest who suffered regional discrimination, and discussed them in his Ilsa yusa [The legacies of unknown scholars].42

It was in such a manner that Chang attempted to reform and promote classical studies in addition to the adoption of new learning for the sake of enlightenment, or rather

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40 Ibid., 8, p. 15.
42 Chang Chiyŏn chŏnsa, 2, p. 613.
technological enlightenment. However, although the categories of classical studies that he indicated were naturally Confucian ethics and morality, he also included Eastern literature and law. As it became impossible to champion political reform and questions of nationalism under colonial rule, the nature of his self-strengthening theories changed, became distorted, and took an increasingly conservative shape where he stopped referring to his theory of the “great unity” that he had proposed in the Taedonggyo movement in the last years of the Great Han empire.

5. Conclusion

Within Confucian ideology there has been pyŏn’ŏng theory that argues for “change according to the changing times,” and “study that which is appropriate for the circumstances.” However, the question of when, how, and what had to be changed differed depending on the individual intellectual’s scholarly traditions or perception of the times. An increased number of Confucian literati experienced an intellectual change after witnessing the Japanese victory in the Sino-Japanese war, the 1894 peasant uprisings, Kabo reforms, the reform projects of the Great Han empire, and the Independence Association movement. We have categorized the reform theories of these individuals as pyŏnbŏp theory.

Thinking that they had to enact some sort of change suitable to the circumstances, they first criticized the conservative ch’ŏksa (“repel foreigners”) theory. Although they recognized the need for change and also criticized Confucianism, they did not agree with Westernizing by adopting Christianity, a position held by enlightenment theorists. They defined “enlightenment” according to their Confucian ideology and perceived of it as a
reform of traditions that takes into account both the new and the old, from the past and present. In the end, this pyŏnt’ŏng theory evolved into the form of pyŏnbŏp theory where abuses would be eliminated through the reform of institutions and laws. They attempted to achieve autonomy and self-strengthening through reform and restoration. At the same time, they discussed a modern constitutional government through the extension of popular rights based on the notion that “the people are the foundation of the land.” They pointed out that the enlightenment of the “civilization and enlightenment theory” (munmyŏng kaehwa ron) had no practical effects, that it only attempted external changes, but was limited in terms of the nation and the people because of its pursuit of Westernization. Instead they sought their clues for social reform from late Chosŏn sirhak thought.

We have thus examined pyŏnbŏp reform theories vis-à-vis Chang Chiyŏn. Having a background in the Confucian scholastic traditions of the Yŏngnam region as well as sirhak influences, he had an intellectual shift after the establishment of the Great Han Empire and at around the peak of the Independence Association movement. While participating in the publication of the Hwangsŏng sinmun, he adopted new Western learning based on a consideration of and compromise between the new and the old, and asserted that they had to maintain national autonomy in order to carry out self-strengthening by developing education and industry. After the protectorate treaty in 1905, his theories expanded into a self-strengthening theory based on social Darwinism. Meanwhile, as he criticized the fact that Confucian studies had gradually become outdated and the Confucian literati increasingly intolerant, he participated in the founding of the religion Taedonggyo.
The self-strengthening ideas of Chang Chiyŏn deteriorated after Japanese colonization in 1910. Believing that conquest of Asia by a gradually empowered and thriving Japan was an inevitability, he came to accept the colonization of Chosŏn. Ultimately, towards the latter half of 1914, he began to write actively for the Maeil sinbo, the mouthpiece of the colonial government. While discussing the mistakes in the national characteristics of Chosŏn, he sympathized with Japan’s colonial ideology and went as far as to praise the leadership and promotion of industrial development by the colonial authorities after colonization. However, as the yellow races stood united with Japan at the lead during the first World War, he stood as an advocate of the “Pan-Asia Monroe doctrinism” for the protection of the people of Asia. This argued that at the end of World War I, “nationalism” would ultimately prevail throughout the world, Chosŏn will have already been colonized by Japan, and all peoples of Asia, because of their similarities in race and culture, would have to unite under the aegis of Japan.

Chang’s collaboration with the Japanese during the 1910s in fact could be foreseen in his supplementation of Japan’s historical theses as written in the Taehan kangyŏk ko [A study on the powerful region of the Great Han] at the end of the Great Han period, as well as in his inability to recognize the true nature behind the East Asian co-prosperity sphere (Tongyang samguk chehyu ron) and social Darwinism. In particular, although social Darwinism was a theory that was directed towards self-strengthening or “survival of the fittest,” once self-strengthening failed, there was no alternative but for it to lead to a conquest ideology that justified the rule by the strong over the weak. Of course, having seen WWI, though he did gesture critically towards the military authoritarianism of the West this was not articulated into a theory that negated Japanese
rule over Chosŏn. For this reason, Chang, who could not actively associate himself as a Japanese collaborator, hung even more tenaciously to Confucianism. He promoted through Confucianism, a scholarship based on pyŏnt’ŏng, the classical studies that originated Confucianism in the first place and attempted to adopt new Western learning (technology, commerce and industry). Although he had developed this theory before Japanese colonization, it deteriorated and retrogressed under the realities of colonial rule, diluting his ideas of national self-strengthening so that in the end, it became distorted into a theory of enlightenment, self-strengthening, and self-defense under Japanese leadership. He was unable to overcome the concepts of self-strengthening and conquest ideology, and thus such a transformation of his ideas towards a pursuit of Japanese enlightenment was inevitable.

The transformation and downfall of Chang Chiyŏn at the end of the Great Han period is different from likeminded pyŏnbŏp reform theorists such as Pak Ŭnsik and Sin Ch’aeho. Those who went into exile abroad around 1910 had pointed out the theoretical limitations in the kyemong enlightenment movement’s promotion of technological skills and were largely advocates of the pyŏnbŏp theory. In particular, Pak Ŭnsik and Sin Ch’aeho denied self-strengthening and enlightenment based on social Darwinism and opposed authoritarian imperialist invasions. Their theories were based on national particularities and national spirit (history, language, religion, etc.). Of course, Sin Ch’aeho went even further by negating Confucianism itself and aiming for popular revolution. From the very outset, modern pyŏnbŏp reformists proposed modern reforms which they envisioned from a position of autonomy and independence, that differed from
the modernist position of enlightenment theory and was based instead on the traditional
culture that included Confucianism.