Sinocentrism in East Asia and the Task of Overcoming It

LIM Hyung-taek
Sungkyunkwan University
Sinocentrism in East Asia and the Task of Overcoming It

LIM Hyung-taek
Sungkyunkwan University

1. What is East Asia?
Talking of East Asia as an academic subject may seem to require the discussants to hold a certain designated methodological standpoint; however East Asia is more than something which should be subjected to a methodology, it is first and foremost a reality. Moreover, for the East Asian people, it is nothing less than their daily reality. In clear recognition of such fact, the organizers of the present academic conference have included the following caveat in the text explaining the selection of the theme, “The separation of Korea, China and Japan into “colony”, “semi-colony”, and “imperial power” that occurred during the modern era had the effect of not only entrenching the conflict structure between these three nations, but also ushered in the most profound period of conflict in the history of their relations with one another. As the scars of this era have yet to heal, mutual distrust and conflict may easily flare up among the peoples of the region.” They then proceeded to point out another problem, “This is also the case where historical narratives are concerned. Each of these three countries describes its history from an ethnocentric standpoint that is rooted in the use of the “state” or “nation” as the basic unit of analysis. This has led to the emergence of a debate over “how to establish an East Asian identity” during the process of seeking to cement peace and prosperity in East Asia. Such discussions have for the most part revolved around “the search for a centralizing perspective,” or more precisely, “the identification of...
the dominant order and culture." The present article is based on the manuscript that this author prepared for the academic conference sponsored by the Northeast Asian History Foundation under the theme. “East Asia as Seen from the Standpoint of the Center and periphery” and the organizers explained the purpose of the conference as follows: “Based on a keen awareness of such circumstances, this conference seeks to look into the history of East Asia from the viewpoint of the “center and periphery.” This author agrees not only with the issues raised by this academic conference, but also with the methodology employed to address them.

This study analyzes the attempts that have been made to overcome “sinocentrism” in East Asia. While sinocentrism was the theoretical foundation on which a long-enduring China-led East Asian order was established, this ideology eventually came to be perceived as a historical and spiritual obstacle that had to be overcome. Accordingly, the task of overcoming sinocentrism obviously involved its liquidation once and for all. Has sinocentrism really been completely eradicated? In practice, the ideology seems to have disappeared with the passage of time. Be that as it may, can it really be argued that the vestiges of sinocentrism have been completely and irreversibly removed from the collective mindset of East Asia? I would suspect that very few would venture to provide an unequivocally affirmative answer to such questions. In other words, sinocentrism in East Asia can be regarded as having been buried in the modern era despite never having been given a proper funeral. The fact that this ideology has being buried without having undergone the proper burial, or in this case liquidation, carries with it the risk that its ghost may, like the corpse of Count Dracula, one day come back to life. In this vein, the existence of numerous incidents in the not too distant past involving the reemergence of this ideology in some deformed or distorted fashion, points to the fact that there is a high likelihood that it will once again rear its head in the future as well.

The task of overcoming sinocentrism is not one that belongs solely to the past. In this regard, the following sections approach the theme of East Asia based mostly on the writings of the Korean Sirhak scholars. While this theme represents one of my main scholarly interests, it is unavoidable that my perception of East Asia is one that is greatly influenced by the fact that I am Korean. That being said, it is hoped that this approach will be perceived as having its own significance and characteristics.

2. The Issue of Sinocentrism in the Yörha ilgi

“One who says the earth is square perceives reality based on the notion of righteousness; meanwhile, one who argues the earth is round abandons this righteousness in the name of his belief in the actual shape.”

1 Yörha ilgi.
This remark was made by Pak Chiwon (1737-1805), a Choson-era intellectual, to a Chinese colleague during a discussion which the two had while standing under the moon in Rehe (modern day Chengde in Hebei Province) during Pak’s visit to China’s national educational institute or Taixue. Pak then continued, “If there is also a world in the moon over there, then how can we be sure that there aren’t two people sitting together on a railing and looking at the light emanating from this earth while discussing the issue of how the earth rises and sets?” The Chinese scholar repeatedly burst into laughter before saying, “What a wonderful perception that is!” While Pak’s notion, which was based on the hypothesis that there is another world in the moon, was essentially a joke, it was also much more than the fruit of an active imagination. His thought was based on the scientific fact that while one is able to see the moon rise and set from the earth, one would also be able to see the earth rise and set from the moon. Thus, by introducing a novel way of thinking, Pak effectively reminded people of the need to view things from a different perspective. As such, although his remarks may have appeared to have been more humorous than sincere, his logic was anything but commonplace. However, the above quote attributed to Pak is not only a sincere statement, but must also be read as a line of reasoning that contains a much more profound meaning.

The notions that “the sky is round and the earth is square” [ch’ŏnwŏn chibang] and that “the sky is moving while the earth stands still” [ch’ŏndong chijoong] constituted a conventional worldview in the cultural zone that shared the use of Chinese characters. This viewpoint was not markedly different from the one which prevailed in the western Christian world, where the emergence of the theory that the earth is round and moving was regarded as revolutionary. Thus, this epochal theory came to be known as “Copernican revolution.” Another Chinese scholar who was engaged in conversation with Pak at that time clearly displayed the crisis that affected the traditional sinocentric worldview, “We Confucian intellectuals have long believed that the round sky moves, while the square earth stands in the center of the universe, but this belief has been shaken by the Westerners.”

The sinocentrism discussed in this study is of course based on the belief that the sky is round and the earth is square, and that the sky is moving and the earth stands still.

In fact, the concept of Zhongguo, a term that literally means Middle Kingdom but in essence was used to convey the notion that China was the center of civilization, was born out of the logic developed by the Song dynasty scholar Shi Jie that, “The sky is high and the earth is low. That which is in the center of the world is called the Zhongguo, meaning the central country; meanwhile, those on the periphery of the world are known as the four barbarian peoples [siyi].” Naturally, the concept assumes that China is in fact this Zhongguo.

---

2 Yŏrha ilgi.
3 Yŏrha ilgi.
4 Chungkuknon.
This concept can be regarded as the essence of “sinocentrism.” The logical conclusion of this sinocentric worldview is that the Chinese are surrounded on all four sides by barbarians. That being the case, the question thus becomes that of how the people who were classified as belonging to the category of the four barbarians perceived this sinocentric worldview. This question was concisely answered by Pak:

“The whole world serves the Chinese Emperor [huangdi] as the only ruler, so the Great Qing controls the universe and Emperor Qianlong rules over the sun and the moon as well as the sky and the earth.”5

However, one would be hard-pressed to argue that Pak truly believed the answer he provided. As seen in his distinct argument that “One who says the earth is square perceives reality based on the notion of righteousness,” Pak already realized that the traditional worldview was a manipulation of reality for the purpose of highlighting the established principle of righteousness, or little more than an idealistic fiction. Accordingly, the above quote can be taken to represent little more than Pak simply following the general trend of the day. Much like there are not two suns or moons in the sky, so there can only be but one king who stands as the highest ruler in the center of the universe. Thus, the concept of “One King—Great Unity” came into being through the justification of the above-mentioned notion as a permanent unchanging principle that transcended reality. This environment in which the whole world was believed to serve a common emperor eventually gave way to an international order that emerged based on this logic of “one king.” In turn, this international order was maintained through tribute relations. In short, the world that revolved around China constituted a tribute system.

It goes without saying that this world of great unity (tribute system) was established in accordance with the principle that China represented the center of the universe. Pak’s argument to the effect that “one who argues the earth is round abandons this righteousness in the name of his belief in the actual shape,” clearly indicates that he fundamentally refused and excluded the notion of “One King—Great Unity.” This refusal can be regarded as being based on his clear understanding of the ideological meaning implicit in the theory that the earth is round and moves around the sun. Then, can we surmise that Pak had effectively overcome sinocentrism?

How could this sinocentrism be overcome? The resolution of this issue represents an important philosophical task that must be carried out as part of the study of the historical process that eventually led to the advent of the modern world. In this regard, while Pak appears to have overcome this issue from a theoretical standpoint, the reality of the times in which he existed was such that he

5 Yörha i/lgi.
effectively lived within a system that had been built based on this sinocentric worldview. Existence is said to determine consciousness; however, as proven on numerous occasions in the human world, this consciousness begins to take on a life of its own once it has been established as an ideal or religious belief. In this instance, attention should also be drawn to the fact that sinocentrism contributed greatly to the formation of the above-mentioned Chinese character cultural zone. The contents and form of this world based on this notion of one great unity under China were significantly advanced by the ability to disseminate texts that were based on the use of the same characters. In this way, this world came to have a distinct meaning as a civilizational concept. In other words, this had the effect of ushering in the notion of “Chinese civilization.” Did Pak’s intellectual exploration push him in the direction of breaking with this Chinese civilization? Here, evidence would seem to indicate that he to some extent sought refuge in the notion of sinocentrism as viewed from a civilizational standpoint.

The advent of the modern world ushered in by the West in the 19th century had the effect of all but dismantling the tributary system that existed in East Asia. However, it had the effect of burying the sinocentric worldview as well. In this regard, the burial of this sinocentric worldview before it had been effectively overcome represents, from the standpoint of the history of ideas, the delaying of the completion of this very important task.

3. Criticism Emanating from the Destabilized Tribute System

The Chinese world order(tribute system) introduced above can be regarded, in its own finite form, as imbued with a sense of perpetuity. This sense of perpetuity existed until East Asia began to be incorporated into the Western-led modern world from the mid 19th century onwards. In some of my previous works, I proposed that the 17th-19th centuries should be defined as that of “the destabilized tribute system.” “While the East Asian world of the 17th century was marked by the advent of a historical drama of change, the period that ensued can be regarded as that of “the destabilized tribute-based order.” The so-called Seven-Year War that began with the Japanese invasion of Korea in 1592 and expanded into an international conflict can be regarded as having been a prelude to this historic drama. This drama opened with the onset of the Edo era on the Japanese Archipelago and the transfer of power from the Ming to the Qing on the Chinese Mainland. The establishment of the Qing imperial structure ushered in a period of 200 years of relative stability throughout this East Asian “world.” However, a crack had already emerged during the process of establishing this imperial structure that subsequently lay hidden below the surface. The disturbances of the 19th century proved to be the blow that expanded the crevice in the foundation of this system to the point where the structure’s restoration was no longer possible. The inability to restore the system was the result of the disruptions caused by the global historic movement known as the Western encroachment in Asia.

Lim 2005b.
The emergence of the Manchuria-based Qing dynasty as the ruler of “the world” was both a shocking event and an absolutely unacceptable reality for the intellectuals of the sinocentric world, who adhered to the principle of “revering the Emperor and expelling the barbarians” [chonwang yang’i]. That being said, the response to this situation varied significantly from place to place and circumstance to circumstance. For instance, upon learning that the Ming dynasty, which was regarded as the epitome of Chinese civilization, had been defeated by the “barbarian” Qing, the Japanese Confucian scholar Hayashi Shunsai (1618-1680) is said to have been barely able to conceal his joy. “This can be regarded as a sign of the replacement of Chinese civilization by a barbarian one. Although this task was carried out by a foreign force abroad, it nevertheless represents a joyful event.”7

Such remarks can be regarded as nothing short of grotesque coming from a Confucian scholar. It would have been unimaginable for a Chosŏn scholar to perceive developments in China as “matters taking place in a foreign region.” Here, the Japanese perspective may be attributable to the fact that they possessed a different perception of space than did their counterparts in Chosŏn. However, the problem with this line of reasoning is that this Japanese intellectual did not analyze these events in a detached fashion, but rather was overcome with joy at what had transpired. In this regard, such sentiment can in large part be explained by the lingering sense of antipathy towards the Ming that prevailed in Japan following the Seven Year War.

On the contrary, Chosŏn intellectuals literally viewed the situation on the Chinese Mainland as being akin to “the sky falling to the ground.”8 This profound sense of grief can in large part be explained by the deeply entrenched belief that “the Emperor of the Great Ming is the king of my king.” The advance of Qing troops into Beijing spurred then 22-year old Yu Hyŏngwŏn to state that the “universe has been overtaken by barbarians” [ch’ŏnha pibal] and that “benevolence and righteousness have been brought to an end” [inŭi ch’ungsae]. From his standpoint, the world was now to be ruled by barbarian customs amidst the collapse of all morality. More highly under the influence of Confucianism (neo-Confucianism) than was the case in the country from which this philosophy originated, Chosŏn society appears to have been more appalled by events than was the case even in China. Thus, while these events were viewed as a matter that occurred in a foreign region and as a joyful affair by Japanese scholars, Chosŏn scholars perceived the situation with a formidable sense of shock and anguish.

Based on this mindset, the ruling elite in Chosŏn set out to establish the notion of “pukpŏllon” [conquering the North, i.e. the Qing] as its ideological foundation. This ideology can be regarded as the logical conclusion of Chosŏn society’s inherent desire to oppose or even negate the Qing. However, this logic was based on the desire to bring about an ideological rather than a physical restoration. This perception of Chosŏn as the centre responsible for restoring “the way of

---

7 Kishimoto Mio and Miyajima Hiroshi 2003:180.
8 Ch’ŏgugi.
Zhonghua” (a term that denotes China as well as Chinese civilization) naturally lends itself to the conclusion that this zhonghua, chungwa in Korean, was to be reborn in Chosŏn. This led to the emergence of the notion of “Chosŏn sinocentrism.” In other words, this was to be a sort of “post-Chinese sinocentrism.” Paradoxically, this notion of Chosŏn sinocentrism shared many similarities with the logic that emerged within the Qing structure. In his imperial edict, Qing’s Emperor Yongzheng proudly proclaimed himself as the rightful guardian of zhonghwa and as the individual who had pursued the policy of unifying the world [ch’ŏnha ilt’ong] to an extent never before seen during any previous dynasties. In other words, he gave substance to the notion that “the Chinese and barbarians belonged to one big family” [hwai ilga]. Thus, a new interpretation of zhonghwa that was devoid of any ethnic connotations was born. In this regard, while Qing-sinocentrism constituted a post-Han sinocentrism, Chosŏn-sinocentrism was a post-Han-Chinese and the sinocentrism outside China. However, neither constituted a true form of “post-sinocentrism.”

It is a historical fact that in the sinocentric world the overturning of the civilized by the barbarians did not lead to the dissolution of the tribute system. It was the same with the transfer of the Ming to the Qing. Nevertheless, why have we defined the era that emerged after this shift as that of the destabilized tribute system? Simply put, it is because this period marked the onset of continued Western influence in terms of the historical changes that took place in Asia. Here, attention should be drawn to the fact that the new weapons invented in the West were introduced in the Seven Year War and in the wars between the Ming and Qing, where they had a decisive impact on the outcome. However, the most profound impact which the West had in this author’s opinion was on the ideological landscape.

Chosŏn came into contact with Western civilization much later than Japan or China. The first recorded Korean encounter with the West occurred in 1631 when a royal mission led by Chŏng Tuwŏn (1581-1642) came across the European missionary Joao Rodriguez (1561-1633; also called in Chinese Lu Ruohan) in the city of Dengzhou on the Shandong Peninsula (as the Liaodong Peninsula was at that time off limits the mission had traveled to China by sea). Having engaged in a conversation with Rodriguez and his party and being presented with books on topics such as astronomy and geography, as well as weapons and measuring instruments, one of the members of the Korean party, amazed by these examples of Western civilization, exclaimed, “How could such individuals, such learning and such objects have emerged from outside of China?” These individuals had always considered all development and creation the work of sages. They were shocked that there existed this civilization that lay outside of the sphere of China and were thrown in great doubt: who would have created this and who would have transmitted it? This line of questioning naturally focused the attention on the issue

9 Yamaguchi 1985:45.
10 Yamaguchi 1985:45.
of whether China in fact represented the center of the universe. Rodriguez answered this question as follows, “The Great Ming is rendered in the center of the Wanguo quantu[Complete Map of the Myriad Countries of the World], however this is merely for the purpose of visual convenience. Each country can in its own right be regarded as the center of the earth.”\textsuperscript{10} The ideological shock caused by these comments, according to my diagnosis, caused the crack in the tribute system. Because it was not transitory but over the years rather continued to increase in intensity, I have come to the conclusion that the restoration of the “destabilized tribute system” became impossible. That being the case, the question thus becomes that of analyzing the theoretical or ideological response to this shock which was prepared by the Korean side.

In my view, the main ideological response to this growing western influence emerged in Sirhak\textsuperscript{11} [practical learning], a term which is now widely associated with the new currents of thought that developed in Chosŏn from the 17th century onwards. In the same period, corresponding scholastic trends also developed in China and Japan. The origins of this new school of thought can be traced back to the unhinging of the tribute system. Lamenting the fact that the “universe has been overtaken by barbarians”\textsuperscript{[ch’ŏnha pi’bal]} and that “benevolence and righteousness have been brought to an end”\textsuperscript{[in’ŭi ch’ungsaeck]}, Yu Hyŏngwŏn longed for a “great sage”\textsuperscript{[taein sŏnsaeng]} who could save the hopeless world. Being however well aware that no such individual was going to appear, Yu set about writing the Pan’gye surok\textsuperscript{12} [Essays on Social Reform] which contained innovative policies and plans.\textsuperscript{12} The fact that this book functioned as a forerunner for the Korean Sirhak should not be perceived as having been an accidental occurrence. Yu’s Pan’gye surok shares many similarities with Huang Zongxi’s Mingyi daifanglun\textsuperscript{[Pre-dawn Discourses for Future Rule]} in terms of background and spirit. The above-mentioned logical framework of Chosŏn-sinocentrism was also rooted in the ideological anguish of the day. Nevertheless, this should be regarded as a rigid variant of the existing sinocentrism rather than as an actual criticism of this structure. Criticism of sino-centrism went together with the ideological enlightenment occasioned by the western shock:

“Viewed from the standpoint of Man, Chinese civilization can be regarded as being diametrically different from that of the barbarians; however, viewed from the standpoint of Heaven, both the Yin and Zhou dynasties had their own headgear that was based on the customs of the day. That being the case, it becomes unreasonable for us to solely hate the red caps of the Qing dynasty!”\textsuperscript{13}

---

\textsuperscript{10} Lim 2005a.
\textsuperscript{11} Pan’gye surok.
\textsuperscript{12} Yŏrha ilgi.
\textsuperscript{13} Uisan mundap.
As mentioned above, Pak Chiwo˘n once claimed that “one who argues the earth is round abandons righteousness in the name of his belief in the actual shape.” Using the same logic, Pak maintained that when viewed from the impartial standpoint of Heaven, the separation of civilized and barbarian worlds based on the notion of absolute righteousness no longer was supportable. For his part, Hong Daeyong, one of Pak’s contemporaries, asserted that while a barbarian invasion of China was regarded as constituting an act of thievery[ku], China’s invasion of barbarian lands was referred to as the repelling of such thieves[chok]. However, Hong maintained that both actions were in the end identical in nature. This can be regarded as Hong’s theory of peaceful coexistence between the Chinese and neighboring barbarians. Such logic is similar to that developed by Shi Jie in his Chungkuknon:

“The neighboring barbarians should remain in their lands, while the Chinese remain in theirs. It is only natural that each of them lives where they stand.”

Although discussing coexistence, Shi Jie’s logic was not drawn from a belief in the equality of values. However, Hong employed the analogy with scientific knowledge about the earth as a globe and the rotation of the earth to instill a more pluralistic approach to the relationship between the “civilized” Chinese and their “barbarian” neighbors. Thus, a new perspective had been added to the logic of “center” and “periphery.”

4. The Concepts of Dongyang and Zhonghua in the Modern World
At the close of the 19th century, in 1886, the Choson scholar Kim Yunsik(1835 - 1922) compiled a book entitled Man’guk ch‘ongpyo[Current Status of the World] which was designed to help foster an awareness of the recognition of the new world that was dawning. In its preface, Kim stated, “The world [man’guk] we now live in is not the one of the past, so it does not employ the same characters or modes of transportation.” At that time, man’guk was a concept that referred to a cultural sphere that had used the same characters and modes of transportation for centuries and centuries. His remark clearly shows that “the world” was in the process of being expanded from the small self-contained world that revolved around China to the entire earth. This new world can also be labeled as the modern world. The collapse of the long destabilized tribute system that occurred in this modern world had the effect of removing the logical foundation of the long-held view of the world that centered on China. In fact, as we have seen above,

15 Chungkuknon.
16 Man’guk ch‘ongpyo.
17 Taedong cheguksa.
critical views of the sinocentric worldview had already surfaced amongst some enlightened intellectuals when the tribute system first began to falter; however, their influence at that time was not strong enough to alter the system connected to this ideology. Accordingly, the ideological task of overcoming sinocentrism took on a certain sense of inevitability only during this new stage that was now dawning.

One of the major issues that came to the forefront in this newly dawning modern world was that of recognizing the identity of the self and that of the others associated with it. In this context, Shin Ch’aeho introduced the term Taedong[the Great Eastern] to refer to Korea in his essay entitled Taedong cheguksa[History of the Great Eastern Country], in which he attempted to establish the structure of Korean history.\(^{17}\) This can also be understood as an attempt on Shin’s part to establish a modern identity for Korea. Another one of the main issues that emerged during this period was that of deciding how the behemoth on the Mainland should be referred to. While Japan decided to refer to this country as Shina, China referred to itself as Zhonghua or Zhongguo. Meanwhile, another problem emerged for the first time: that of identifying the manner in which the old world that had revolved around China should be referred to. Asia, East Asia, and Dongyang(Korean: Tongyang, Japanese: Tōyō), terms which are still widely used today, emerged during this period as the concepts that included the old world that had centered on China. Let us now turn our attention to the last of these terms, Dongyang.

A look at historical records shows that the term was generally understood during the Qing dynasty to refer to the seas that lay to the east of the South Seas, or the seas that lay to the east of Vietnam by today’s standards. Even in Modern China, the term Tongyang was not used to refer to Asia as a whole. The current meaning of Dongyang is believed to have been formed in modern Japan. This theory, first proposed by Japanese academics, has been accepted as an established fact by Korean scholars during the process of the discourse on East Asia. However, this theory is not strictly based on facts.

It is necessary here to note that Dongyang was originally understood to refer to the sea to the east, and as such was not employed as a proper name. Therefore, the term Dongyang as it was then understood, as the sea to the east, could be used in many instances. However, Dongyang came to take on a specific meaning when it was used to as the counterpart to Xiyang[Occident], Sŏyang in Korean. The book Wánguō gōngfa[Elements of International Law] of 1863 contains a map in which the world was effectively divided into eastern and western hemispheres.\(^{18}\) It also describes what is now know as the Pacific Ocean as the Dadongyang[Taedongyang in Korean], meaning Great East Sea, which was here regarded as the counterpart to the Daxiyang[Taesŏyang in Korean], meaning Great West Sea. Meanwhile, in the following excerpt taken from a report which the Korean envoy Chŏng Tuwŏn submitted to the king following his encounter with the missionary Rodriguez

\(^{18}\) Wheaton 2002.

\(^{19}\) Chigu chŏnyo.

\(^{20}\) Chosŏn chaek’ryak.
during the 17th century, we can see that the West was already being referred to as Sŏyang: “I have seen the cannons of the red barbarians of the West Sea”. For his part, in his Chigu chŏnyo [Descriptions of the Nations of the World], Ch’oe Han’gi referred to the Pacific Ocean as the Tongyang taehae [Great Sea of the Orient] and stated that Japan and Okinawa were two countries that were located within this Dongyang area. It is also important to note that Ch’oe did not introduce the concept of Dongyang as being the counterpart of the West or Sŏyang. The first reference to the concept of Dongyang as the counterpart to Xiyang which this author has come across appears in the Chaixian ceful [A Strategy for Korea] written by Huang Zunxian in 1870. Speaking of the United States, Huang states that as it geographically abuts on the Dadongyang, it is very interested in the safety of the countries in the Tongyang area. In addition, the above-mentioned Man’guk chŏngpyo also includes a reference to Tongyang kakkuk [the individual countries in the Orient]. Thus, while there was no clear distinction between the self and others, or more precisely no concept of Tongyang as the counterpart to Sŏyang, at the time when Ch’oe Han’gi wrote his work, the emergence of the West as a major force from the mid-19th century onwards resulted in impelling East Asians to develop an awareness of this Sŏyang, which in turn naturally also lent itself to the emergence of its counterpart: Tongyang.

While modern Japan was not the first to employ the term To’yŏ/Dongyang/ Tongyang, it attached a particular meaning to it. While modern China buried this concept within the self, modern Japan was able to use it to expand the self. The following quote from a Japanese scholar perfectly illustrates the situation from the Japanese standpoint:

“The Sino-Japanese War launched in the name of preserving peace throughout the Orient, the Russo-Japanese War initiated in the name of the perpetual maintenance of the safety of the Orient, and the Korea-Japan Annexation treaty calling for the promotion of mutual happiness and the establishment of permanent peace in the Orient, ... the declaration of war on the U.S. and U.K. in 1941 in the name of the establishment of stability in East Asia and world peace through this venture....” Looking at such phraseology in official statements alone, one could be forgiven for being deluded into believing that modern Japan’s external actions consistently sought to bring stability and peace in the Orient and East Asia. Such a look back at Japanese modern history cannot help but instill a sense of shock at the extent to which Japan used the concept of the Orient or East Asia to justify its aggressive war efforts and colonial rule.”

To’yŏ was thus a sphere which was exploited by Japanese imperialism. In other

21 Man’guk chŏngpyo.
23 Chŏn chaek’ryak.
words, Japan used this concept that it regarded as the counterpart to Seiyō/Sōyang to strengthen and expand itself. As a result, the notion of Toyō introduced by modern Japan was one that revolved around Japan.

While China did not begin to use Zhonghua as its official name until after the Chinese Revolution of 1911, the more customary name Zhongguo dates back to olden times. The Chinese use of the term Zhonghua to refer to their country is believed to have gained popularity with the dawning of the modern world. In this connection, the above-mentioned Chinese official Huang Zunxian stated, “We Chinese always refer to China as Zhonghua in front of foreigners; however, it cannot be denied that this name, which was based on the distinction between the self as hua[the civilized] and others as yi[barbarians], to a certain extent connotes a sense of respect for the self and disdain for others.”\(^23\) It is clear that this name, which was selected by the Chinese themselves, is more or less problematic in the modern world. However, as the use of such a term is a long-standing practice the use of either Zhonghua or Zhongguo can perhaps be sanctioned. However, the problem lies in the sinocentric connotations imbedded in this term.

As mentioned above, Wanguo Gongfa was published at the beginning of the modern era in China. The book was designed to help the Chinese adapt to the modern international order that prevailed in the western world. Its preface begins as follows: “Being a shining example for the world[susôn jigu], China is the place where all the countries come to meet.”\(^24\) The use of such language to refer to itself can be regarded as a clear example of Chinese chauvinism. The preface ends with the following remarks: “All the individuals who visit China are taken aback by its prestige and in awe of its moral influence. In this regard, this book will prove to be a very important tool during the process of sinicizing the rest of the world. This book should be kept close at hand whenever foreigners pay visit to our nation.”\(^25\) This type of expression can be regarded as an attempt to perceive the international relations structure that prevailed in the modern world from the standpoint of the traditional tribute order. It is a salient example of the extent to which Chinese intellectuals failed to understand the modern world, and of the degree to which they remained preoccupied with the notion of sinocentrism. As a result, while Japan was able to attend the International Law Conference which epitomized the modern international order held at the end of the 19th century, China found itself ignominiously excluded.

In this regard, let us now turn our attention to the notion of Pan-Asianism developed by Sun Wen, the father of the modern Chinese state. The main question which we can pose at this juncture is that of whether Sun’s notion of Pan-Asianism effectively overcame sinocentrism, or was simply another variant thereof. The latter option appears to have recently gained the upperhand amongst scholars. For instance, the young Chinese researcher Yang Nianqun has stated, “Sun's notion of

\(^{24}\) Wheaton 2002:3.
\(^{25}\) Wheaton 2002:3.
\(^{26}\) Yang 2005:93.
Pan-Asianism was clearly established based on an already long gone tribute system of which only a cultural shell remained.” While not an expert on this subject, I would nevertheless like to air my views on this particular topic. Here, one specific point must be kept in mind where this particular question is concerned.

While Sun possessed certain qualities as a thinker, he was strictly speaking a politician. The ideological task of escaping from sinocentrism could not have been achieved by a Chinese national unless the latter possessed a mindset capable of critical self-reflection and self-denial. In this regard, the only individual who as a radical thinker was able to successfully achieve this task in his literary works was Lu Xun. It would be natural not to expect too much of Sun, a politician who was internally and outwardly faced with numerous difficulties. In this respect, his view of Korea requires special attention. When referring to colonized Korea he regularly employed commonly used idioms which displayed a deeply-rooted perception that Korea had in the past been a vassal of China: “China and Korea, originally brother countries (China the older and Korea the younger) sharing the same culture, have a long history of interdependent relations that makes it such that they cannot be separated from one another even for a short while; in fact they are like wheels and axles [pogo sangu] or lips and teeth [sunchi sangu].” However, he then went on to state that “relations between Korea and China are similar to those between the United Kingdom and the United States,” thus indicating that he did not really believe relations between the two neighbors were in fact based on a sense of subordination. His conclusion on this particular occasion was that: “It goes without saying that China has an automatic obligation to aid the Korean efforts to gain independence from Japan.” China subsequently put Sun’s remarks into practice by recognizing and supporting the Korean Provisional Government.

There can be no denying that Sun subconsciously possessed a certain ambiguous form of sinocentrism. One could also point out the inherent problems associated with his remarks that seemingly glorify the tribute system. Nevertheless, Sun, who on the hand led the 1911 Revolution, while advocating the notion of Great Asianism on the other, can be regarded as having possessed a certain degree of historical progressiveness. Let us now compare this perception of Korea to that of Liang Qichao. These perceptions of Korea can be regarded as also reflecting their perception of China, as well as all of East Asia. Liang was much more interested in Korea than any other Chinese intellectual at that time. In this regard, he is well known to have expressed his regret at the Korean loss of sovereignty. More strictly speaking however, what he really mourned was Japan’s gaining of control over Korea’s sovereignty rather than the pain which this action had caused Koreans. The Chinese proverb which states that the teeth get cold when the lips are removed [chunwang chi’han] can be regarded as succinctly expressing what really concerned Liang. It is of course natural for countries to put their interests first. However,
Liang went one step further by stressing the fact that Korea's emergence as an independent state at the dawn of the modern era represented China's first step towards eventual failure. Drawing on notions contained in Chinese classics, he criticized Korea for having established diplomatic relations with foreign countries in the modern era, “When did the notion of one king under the universe disappear? How can a vassal state freely establish diplomatic relations?” He thus appears to have regarded the tribute system as having been an unshakeable and unchanging existence. In Liang's eyes, Korea could only exist within the tribute system. This view was also supported by the Qing Empire that opposed the Japanese Empire. Absorbed in this opposition to Japanese imperialism, Liang composed an image of East Asia that was rooted in traditional notions of sinocentrism. On the contrary, Sun's view of Korea as a country with whom China maintained reciprocal and equal relations was closely related to his perception that his country had to be reborn through the 1911 Revolution.

The problems inherent in Liang's view of Korea can be regarded as having been closely related to the fact that he never overcame sinocentrism. Deeply engrained in his consciousness, this sinocentrism easily found common ground with imperialism. The distortions inherent in Liang's worldview are rendered even more serious by the fact that he was one of the most influential modern East Asian intellectuals of the early 20th century, and that his work heavily impacted both Korea and Japan. The seriousness of the distortions associated with his work lies in the fact that nearly one century later his notions are still deep-rooted in the consciousness that prevails in East Asia.

Having heavily criticized him in the past as part of a general campaign of historical revisionism, scholars in China have recently begun to refer to Liang in positive terms. However, both of these assessments have in effect failed to clearly grasp the distortion that lies at the core of Liang's view of China. Well aware of his great influence on Korea during this period, Korean scholars have also failed to pay proper attention to this distortion. Therefore, there needs to be a fundamental rethinking of why such a situation has occurred, as well as efforts to understand the implications thereof.

5. Conclusion

It is an obvious truism that the historic and ideological task of overcoming sinocentrism is not one that is limited to one country, but rather a common problem that must be addressed by all of East Asia. This task was first recognized and theoretically raised by Korea's Sirhak scholars, whom in this regards can be perceived as having been pioneers in this particular field of inquiry. What position did Chinese and Japanese scholars take vis-à-vis this task during this period? To the best of this author's knowledge, Chinese scholars never raised any such questions during the Qing Dynasty, while Japanese scholars touched on the issue, but not in a truly serious fashion.

How can this situation be explained? It goes without saying that no significant differences existed in terms of the three countries' intellectual
capabilities. Rather, this gap can be explained by the mutual differences in their respective standpoints. Simply put, the key point which should be focused on here is the relationship between center and periphery. China, as the center, appears to have been blissfully unaware of any problem or simply too intoxicated with itself. Meanwhile, Japan adopted its own unique response that was based on its status as a remote peripheral entity. While the island nation was engaged in a one-sided love affair with the center on the one hand, it paradoxically attempted to escape from, or challenge it, on the other. Having been much more deeply saturated by the culture of the center than Japan, Korea, a small country that lay in close geographical proximity to the center, experienced a much higher degree of agony. It is precisely this type of agony that led to the line of questioning developed by the Sirhak scholars.

With the advent of modern times, East Asia became part of the periphery of the new Western-led global world. Meanwhile, East Asia found itself falling under the specter of Japanese hegemony. Thus, the traditional regional order led by China was effectively thrown on its ear, with the result being the emergence of a tripartite structure of conflict that pitted Korea, China and Japan against one another. While this structure was dismantled after 1945, East Asia found itself being thrown into even more profound strife and confrontation as it became one of the hottest spots in the emerging global Cold War. All of these horrors were experienced by the Korean people during the past century. During that process, a permanent division took root on the Korean peninsula, and Korea became a hotbed of conflict that still remains intact even after the collapse of the Cold War system.

How did the South Korean intelligentsia perceive East Asia during these modern and contemporary eras? Simply put, East Asia did not exist for them. Blinded by ideologies such as anti-communism and anti-Japanism, they found themselves unable to take a broad view of the whole region. Instead, they heavily leaned toward the United States. This can be regarded as a phenomenon unique to South Korea, a country that while being located on the front line of the Cold War structure, is also, because of its peripheral status, somewhat secluded from the world led by the United States.

In a previous paper, I defined the changes in South Korean society and culture during this period as having been characterized by “leaving Asia for America”\([\text{tara immi}]\). In this regard, Korea can be regarded as having only returned to East Asia at the end of the 20th century when the Cold War system collapsed once and for all. Nonetheless, Korea continues to be a captive of the US-led world order and subject to US influence in various regards. This must be accepted as a stark reality.

The conclusion can thus be reached that we need to look upon the Korean peninsula as an intermediary core. Such a possibility was already distinctly presented by Chosön’s Sirhak scholars, who first raised doubts about sinocentrism. The first task that will have to be achieved if we are to achieve common peace and prosperity throughout East Asia is that of doing away with the link to this not so distant past that is the division of the Korean peninsula. This task is not that of one
country alone, but rather one for all of East Asia to achieve in harmony. Proper attention should also be paid to the international flow that is globalization during this process. To attain such an end, the Korean people will have to not only produce balanced common sense-based discourses, but also develop means to put these into practice by making the most of the epistemological benefits associated with the Korean peninsula's status as an intermediary core, and a small rather than large country.

GLOSSARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Korean</th>
<th>Pinyin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ch’ŏndong chijŏng</td>
<td>天動地靜</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ch’ŏnha p’ibal</td>
<td>天下被髮</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ch’ŏnha ilt’ong</td>
<td>天下一統</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ch’onwŏn chibang</td>
<td>天國地方</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chengde</td>
<td>承德</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chŏk</td>
<td>賊</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chŏng Tuwŏn</td>
<td>鄭斗源</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chonwang yang’i</td>
<td>尊王攘夷</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chunghwa/zhonghua</td>
<td>中華</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chunwangchihan</td>
<td>脣亡齒寒</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dadongyang/Taedongyang</td>
<td>大東洋</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daxiyang/Taesŏyang</td>
<td>大西洋</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dongyang/Tongyang/Tŏyŏhua</td>
<td>東洋</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>huangdi</td>
<td>皇帝</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hwai ilga</td>
<td>華夷一家</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>int’u ch’ungsaek</td>
<td>人義充塞</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ku</td>
<td>寇</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaodong</td>
<td>遼東</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>man’guk</td>
<td>番國</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mingyi daifanglun</td>
<td>明夷待訪論</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pogŏ sang’ŭi</td>
<td>輔車相倚</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shina</td>
<td>支那</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>siyi</td>
<td>四夷</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sırhak</td>
<td>實學</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sŏyang/Seiyŏ</td>
<td>西洋</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sunch’i sang’ŭi</td>
<td>脣齒相依</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>susŏn jigu</td>
<td>首善之區</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tara immi</td>
<td>脫亞入美</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taedong</td>
<td>大東</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taein sŏnsaeng</td>
<td>大人先生</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taixue</td>
<td>太學</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tongyang kakkuk</td>
<td>東洋各國</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tongyang taehae</td>
<td>東洋大海</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yi</td>
<td>夷</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yongzheng</td>
<td>雍正</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhongguo</td>
<td>中國</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zhonghua/chunghwa</td>
<td>中華</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

REFERENCES

Primary Sources
Chigu chŏnyo 地球典要. Ch’oe Han’gi 崔漢綺 (1803–1877). In Myŭngnammu chŏnchip 明南樓全集 vol.3.
Chosŏn chak’ryak 朝鮮策略. Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲 (1610–1695).
Ch’ogugi 貞巌記. Pak Chiwŏn 李趾源 (1737–1805). In Yŏn’amchip 燕巌集 vol.3.
Chungkuknon 中國論. Sokgae 石介(1003-1043). In Choraechip 石介集 vol.3.
Hwai byŏntae 奉夷志. Hayashi Shunsai 林春齋(1618-1680).
Man’guk chŏngpyo 萬國政表. Pakmun’guk 博文局.
Myŏng’i taebang’nok 明夷待訪錄. Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲(1610-1695).
Pan’gye surok 磐溪隨錄. Yu Hyŏngwo˘n 俞馨遠(1622-1673)
Taedong cheguksa 大東帝國史敍言. Sin Ch’ae-ho 中采浩(1880-1936). In Muae san’go 無涯散稿.
U˘isan mundap 醫山問答. Hong Daeyong 洪大容(1731-1783). In Damho˘nso˘ 湛軒書, 内集 vol.4.
Yo˘n’amchip 燕巖集 17 vols. Pak Chiwo˘n 朴趾源(1737-1805).
Secondary Sources
Chen Ziqi 陳錫祺 eds. 2003. Sun Zhongshan nianpu zhangbian 孫中山年譜長篇
Beijing:Zhonghua shuju 中華書局.