

“First Korean Philosophers” on Philosophy

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journals.sagepub.com/home/dio**Young Ahn Kang**

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Abstract

Philosophy as an academic discipline was introduced to Korea at the end of the 19th century. Philosophical education and professional research did not begin, however, until the 1920s. The first institution in which Koreans could study philosophy as a major at college level was Keijō Imperial University, which was founded by the Japanese in 1924 in Seoul, Korea. The first graduates from this school produced their research in Korean and contributed to the settlement of philosophy on the Korean peninsula. They were joined by Koreans who had returned from study in Austria, Germany, France, and the United States. I call these the “first Korean philosophers.” In order for an individual to belong to this group, three conditions had to be met: first, he or she should have studied philosophy as a major at college level; second, he or she should have read Western philosophical texts in original or in translation; third: he or she should have written a treatise in the contemporary Korean language. Against this background, I am going to deal with three questions. The first question concerns their attitude towards philosophy. The second question concerns their conception of philosophy. The third question concerns the method of doing philosophy. Through this study, I have shown that the first Korean philosophers foreshadowed the struggle between the Marxist and liberal understandings of the world and of humanity, even though they lived in the time of Japanese occupation.

Philosophy as an academic discipline was introduced to Korea at the end of the 19th century. Philosophical education and professional research did not begin, however, until the 1920s. The first institution in which Koreans could study philosophy as a major at college level was Keijō Imperial University (京城帝國大學), which was founded by the Japanese in 1924 in Seoul. The first graduates from this school produced their research in Korean and contributed to the settlement of philosophy on the Korean peninsula. They were joined by Koreans who had returned to their native country after studying in Austria, Germany, France, and the United States. I call these the “first Korean philosophers.” In order for an individual to belong to this group, three conditions had to be met: first, he or she should have studied philosophy as a major at college level; second,

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he or she should have read Western philosophical texts in original or in translation; third: he or she should have written a treatise in the contemporary Korean language. Against this background, I am going to deal with three questions.

The first question concerns their attitude towards philosophy. I was surprised to discover that the first Korean philosophers talked about philosophy as if they were already very familiar with the problems, vocabularies, and materials of Western philosophy. Where did this familiarity come from? In order to be able to answer this question we need to consider the history of the introduction of Western philosophy to Korea after the end of the 19th century.

The second question concerns their conception of philosophy. The first Korean philosophers can be divided into two main groups. The first group conceived philosophy as a way of transforming the world. Pak Chonghong (1903–1976), Sin Namchöl (1903–1958), and Pak Chiu (1909–1949) were representative figures of this group. The second group conceived philosophy as a way of intellectually understanding the world. An Hosang (1902–1999) and Han Ch'ijin (1901–1958?) were two representative examples of this thinking style.

The third question concerns their philosophical method. The first group of philosophers laid much emphasis on “subjective thinking.” Passion (*pathos*) played a very important role here. The second group of philosophers strived to enhance logical and rational thinking (*logos*) and to understand the world and humanity more objectively.

Philosophy as a new academic discipline

Contemporary Korean philosophy has its origins in the time of Japanese occupation of the Korean peninsula (1910–1945). In 1919, one year after the end of the First World War, which the German theologian Hans Küng regards as a “watershed of world history” (Küng, 1990: 20–24), the *Samil* (March 1st) Independence Movement began and a sense of modernization in all spheres of life was awakened among Korean intellectuals. Young philosophers who had studied in various European countries and in the United States came back around this time; founded in 1924, Keijō Imperial University produced, from 1929, graduates with firsthand philosophical knowledge. In 1929, the first issue of the *Sinhŭng* (新興), an academic journal, was published by the early Keijō graduates. In 1933, both young philosophers graduating from Keijō and those who were returning from their studies abroad organized the first philosophical association, the Association of Philosophical Studies (哲學研究會, *Ch'ŏrhak yŏn'guhoe*), and published their official journal, *Philosophy* (哲學, *Ch'ŏrhak*). For them, philosophy meant Western philosophy.

Yet this idea requires further explanation. Essentially, the first Korean philosophers' problems, their method of dealing with these problems, their concepts, and their way of thinking and writing were modeled on Western philosophy. So-called “East-Asian philosophy” was excluded completely from their intellectual education. In this respect, they were different from the traditional Confucian philosophers of earlier generations. The first Korean philosophers shared their problems and philosophical methodology with, for instance, those of the Neo-Kantians, the Neo-Hegelians, and the Husserlians. Two papers from Kim Kyesuk (1905–1989), one of the first graduates from the Keijō philosophy department, are paradigmatic of this. These works were named “A Short Reflection on Cohen's Philosophy” and “On the Speculative Method.” The former comprises a rough introduction to Cohen's epistemological logic; the latter deals with the Hegelian method. Kim's papers are not easy to read; his arguments are rather unclear. It is, however, surprising to discover that Kim deals with the questions as if he were very familiar with them. There is no hesitation, no bafflement, and no discernible intellectual unease. He seems to be at home with everything he is writing about. To the second issue of the same journal, Kwŏn Sewŏn, Kim's co-graduate from Keijō, contributed papers entitled “Addenda to the Distinction between Truth and Correctness” and

“On the Phenomenological Doctrine of Truth.” Kwōn’s papers dealing with Leibniz and Husserl are, by contrast, much easier to read and clearer in their arguments. His tone and his way of thinking and writing are so self-assured that it is difficult to guess that his topics come from outside his cultural background.

The first Korean philosophers studied Western philosophy through reading original sources. They were acquainted with Plato, Kant, Hegel, and Husserl in their original languages or in German. Almost all students learned to read German, and some of them learned Greek and Latin as well. In this way, they could gain firsthand knowledge of Western philosophy. When they did philosophy, they did Western philosophy. Yet how can we explain the fact that the first Korean philosophers felt as if they were at home with everything they dealt with in philosophy, even though the materials, problems, concepts, and theories involved were Western in origin? How could they think and write as if Western philosophy were their own?

One of the many explanations could be that our first philosophers were educated in a modern system of knowledge and research methods. Philosophy was a new discipline, similar to mathematics, physics, psychology, or sociology. Although college education is different from primary and secondary education in the sense that students are expected to develop stronger critical thinking skills, university students are initially trained by means of accepting and emulating the teachings of professors. Modern education is specific in the way it uses completely new technical words and terms such as Freedom (自由), Equality (平等), Justice (正義), Right (權利), Individuals (個人), Subject (主體, 主觀), Thought (思想), Reason (理性), Rationality (合理性), Rationalism (合理主義), Empiricism (經驗主義), Inquiry (探究), Science (科學), and many others. These are vocabularies which determine human activity and the human place in the world, different from traditional ways of thinking. The first generation of contemporary Korean philosophers came to understand humans and the world by learning these new vocabularies and new ways of seeing and thinking. They did not need to explain the meanings of these academic words and terms; they used them as they used their spoons and chopsticks. This is also true of Han Ch’ijin, who came to Korea around 1929 after finishing his doctorate at the University of Southern California. Even though he studied philosophy in English, the vocabularies found in his *Introduction to Logic* (論理學概論, *Nollihak Kaeron*, 1931) and *Most Recent Introduction to Philosophy* (最新哲學概論, *Ch’oesin Ch’ōrhak Kaeron*, 1936) were almost the same as the vocabularies of his colleagues who had trained in philosophy at Keijō or at one of the Japanese universities. Korean contemporary philosophy adopted philosophical vocabularies from the Japanese, whose tremendous works of translation preceded the beginning of Korean contemporary philosophy by almost two generations (Kang, 2012).

Indeed, the second reason for Korean philosophers’ apparent ease with Western philosophy relates to this earlier Japanese history. When the first Korean philosophers began to produce their own writings, Japanese philosophers were already producing their own works after a long period of studying Western philosophy. Various works could be mentioned here: *Nature and Ethics* (自然と倫理, 1912) by Kato Hiroyuki; *Study of Good* (善の研究, 1911), *Thinking and Experience* (思索と體驗, 1911), *Intuition and Reflexion in Self-Consciousness* (自覺における直觀と反省, 1917), *The Problem of Consciousness* (意識の問題, 1920), and *Fine Art and Morality* (藝術と道德, 1927) by Nishida Kitaro; *The Essence and Fundamental Questions of the Philosophy of Religion* (宗教哲學の本質と根本問題, 1920) by Hatano Seiichi; *Natural Science in Recent Time* (最近の自然科学, 1915), *Introduction to Science* (科學概論, 1916), and *Studies in Philosophy of Mathematics* (數理哲學研究, 1925) by Tanabe Hajime; and *Fundamental Questions of Ethics* (倫理學の根本問題, 1916), *Aesthetics* (美學, 1917), and *Personalism* (人格主義, 1922) by Abe Jiro (Hamada, 1994: 170–184). Besides these works, Japanese philosophers had carried out studies on specific subjects or schools of thought, for instance, Kant studies by Abe Yoshihige, Hegel and Husserl studies by Tajahasi Satomi, studies on existentialism by Kuki Sujo, Marxist studies

by Kawakami Hajime and Miki Kiyosi and etc. Korean philosophers could not at this point match their Japanese counterparts, at least on the level of academic output.

It is worthwhile mentioning that even though Neo-Kantianism and Neo-Hegelianism were the most prevalent philosophies in the late 1920s, philosophies concentrating on more concrete aspects of human life such as *Lebensphilosophie*, Marxism and existentialism were also known to Korean young philosophers. This could be the third reason for which Korean philosophers felt at home with contemporary philosophical discourses in academia, even though the philosophy they read and discussed came from the West, via Japan. Most of the first Korean philosophers were interested in contemporary European philosophy. For instance, Kwōn Sewōn and Yi Chongu (1903–1974) were interested in *Lebensphilosophie*; Sin Namch'ōl, Pak Ch'iu, and Chōn Wōnbae (1903–1984) were interested in Marxism; and Pak Chonghong was interested in existentialism. These three schools of philosophy were oriented towards concrete human reality and were basically human-centered and anti-metaphysical. It is understandable that these kinds of philosophy attracted young philosophers who had lost their political autonomy. The first Korean philosophers wanted to understand and change the reality in which they lived. This observation leads us immediately to a key question: what was the motivation for them to do philosophy in so poor and deprived a time as the 1920s and 1930s?

Motivation for doing philosophy

With this question in mind, let us listen to the voice of Pak Chonghong, one of the leading Korean academic philosophers, in his paper of 1933:

As it is well-known, Aristotle said that philosophy begins with astonishment. But that kind of astonishment could be satisfied with escape from ignorance. Is the motivation for our doing philosophy not such a benign astonishment, but agony due to our reality in which we are too much oppressed? (Pak, 1998: 33).

Pak wanted to say that for him the basic rationale for doing philosophy is to be found “in the actual reality of this time, this society, this country.” In his view, philosophy is rooted in human reality. An Hosang, too, thought that the starting point of philosophy is the actual reality in which we live. In an article dealing with the thought of Bruno Bauer, An wrote:

The intrinsic and imminent problem of theoretical philosophy is the real world. ... Reality is not only the starting point of our everyday life, but also that of academic life. Does starting from reality signify leaving reality forever without return? No. Starting from reality is, in the end, carried out in order to finally return to reality, not to leave it forever. Starting from, and leaving reality, then coming back to reality, are the true meaning of human efforts and the end of human life (An, 1934: 125).

For An, “the real beginning of doing philosophy” consists of making a distinction between the visible reality and the invisible but constant and sustaining reality behind the visible. An shares with Pak the notion that reality is the starting point of philosophy, though An differs by proposing two kinds of reality, one visible and the other invisible, and in thinking that reality has an objective order transcending empirical givenness.

Han Ch'ijin, another philosopher who played an important role in introducing philosophy as well as psychology, logic, sociology, theory of education, and democracy to Korea, identified his motivation for doing philosophy as the search for the meaning of human life. In the preface to his *Most Recent Introduction to Philosophy* (最新哲學概論, *Ch'oesin Ch'ōrhak Kaeron*, 1936), he writes:

Every human loves to live, but it is hard to live. Why does human live? Isn't it true that a human wants to live because it is hard, not because it is hard to live? Let's suppose that there is no hardship. For what should a human live? ... Suffering becomes bearable when one knows that he suffers. ... A human can live his own life proactively when he knows himself and his environs. The advantage of philosophy is to know oneself (Han, 1936: 15).

Han's basic understanding of philosophy is rather "weltanschaulich." He understands that the problems of philosophy are the "basic problems human hearts strive to solve" and the "efforts to know the true meaning of human life and universe":

The true meaning of human life lies in knowing oneself. Life becomes more noble and free by knowing oneself. It is a philosopher's duty to guide the way of human life and to make it good and beautiful by means of the investigation and critique of all human experiences. Philosophy exists for a noble life (Han, 1936: 4).

Han claims that philosophy should appeal to the intellect rather than to emotion and will, since philosophy is primarily a search for rational and systematic knowledge, although it does not neglect the important place of will and emotion in human life.

Why did the first Korean philosophers expect that Western philosophy could be a tool for understanding actual reality and transforming it? What is remarkable is that philosophy (in this case, of course, Western philosophy) was the vehicle and process by which the first Korean philosophers asked questions concerning actual reality and found answers to them. They did not rely on traditional Asian thought. Tradition could not assist them in tackling the problems they were facing. "This age is a Westernized age. The life view of the contemporary East-Asians is the same as that of the Westerners," said Han Ch'ijin (Han, 1936: 219). One could clearly argue against this, but it does show an intellectual's understanding of his age. To the first Korean philosophers, philosophy was a means of sharing the fruits of modernity which Western culture bore.

The first Korean philosophers did not have a well-developed science; they didn't have a capitalist market system; they didn't have a democracy; they didn't experience alienation due to technological advances. Nevertheless, they dealt with philosophical questions in the same way as the Westerners and were really not so different from their Western counterparts in doing so. I may say that a culture of modernity began to be rooted in this way on Korean soil, not in reality, but in thinking, or in thought. For the first Korean philosophers, doing philosophy was in itself a practice of the modern way of life. They did it as if they were participating in modernization by means of reading and writing philosophical texts during a period of colonial oppression.

Philosophy and reality: two directions

What was the first Korean philosophers' philosophical method that could enable them to understand and transform reality? It is to be noted that there is a difference between them. An Hosang and Han Ch'ijin tried to understand reality in a more or less objective and rational way. Sin Namch'öl, Pak Ch'iu, and Pak Chonghong tried to understand it in a subjective and passionate way.

Let us consider the cases of An and Han. As I have already said, these two philosophers thought human reality very important. They differ, however, in their manner of conceiving what is reality and how we can understand it, compared to those philosophers who tried to conceive reality in a subjective and passionate way. An argued that philosophy is the "true cognizance of everything related to reality." Philosophy starts from this reality, leaves it, and returns to it again, according to him. In his *Lectures on Philosophy* (哲學講論, *Ch'orhak Kangron*), it appears that An tries to

understand “the reality in contradiction” holistically, dynamically, and dialectically. The reality of humans, as well as that of nature, consists of moments of contradiction. The real is the contradictory, according to An. Going follows coming; losing follows gain; death follows life. Coming and going are the movement of the same, not of two different entities. Their difference appears according to their starting and arrival points. Life and death are different, not in entity, but from the point of view from which they are seen. Everything revolves or rotates in this way. Rotation or revolution is the absolute “truth” of everything, according to An, who writes:

The reason that, when philosophy faces reality, it does not regard the appearance or something visible as all, but is in search of the principle which is hidden behind the visible, is that something visible is nothing but the appearance of the essential principle. The purpose of moving to the essential, not just holding fast to appearance, is in order to understand the appearance deeply and completely from knowing the essential principle... Philosophy is the true cognizance of everything related to reality (An, 1942: 71–72).

In An’s doing philosophy, the “principle of movement, becoming, and revolving” plays an important role, because this is the basic principle on which the problems of being and becoming are dealt with in terms of ontology and cosmology. This does not mean, however, that An dogmatically claims a metaphysics without epistemology. For him, metaphysics presupposes epistemology. In this respect, he is still under the shadow of Neo-Kantianism. Nevertheless, An prioritizes the objective relation to which the object of knowledge pertains, rather than the epistemic subject. This is to be seen in his dealing with the question: “What is true?”

According to An, knowledge consists of judgment. The latter is the act which sets relations among representations (*Vorstellungen*). Setting relations is the fundamental property of judgment. Judgment should be carried out to show the objective relations of things without falling into subjective arbitrariness. For instance, we may say: “Snow is white” or “Roses are plants,” but we cannot say “Snow is black” or “Roses are animals.” Whether a setting of a relation is right or wrong depends on whether there is an objective relation between the items. The sole criterion of truth and falsity is an objective relation. Objective relations determine their own contents according to logical necessity. Truth is nothing other than objective relation, according to An. Although his explanation is extremely opaque and difficult to follow, it is clear that An subscribes to the logicism of Neo-Kantianism in his effort to find the logos of things, inherent in the logical world, independent from the epistemic subject.

Han Ch’ijin stresses the close relationship between philosophy and science. Philosophy should recognize the gains of scientific research and profit from scientific methods, otherwise, it cannot secure reliability. On a scientific basis alone, philosophy can provide a rational view of life and the world without any contradiction. From this background, Han introduces contemporary science into his discussion of ancient and modern views of matter. In the same way, he introduces contemporary psychology into philosophical discussions about the human mind. When Han says of behaviorism that it is “a theory, asserting the human mind is nothing but a form of response to stimuli coming from external environment, and denying a formless spirit,” he is both introducing and criticizing the theory at the same time. When Han talks about the universe, he lays emphasis on the present state of it, saying that speculation on its beginning and end is “a fiction out of human phantasy.” Concerning the question of whether there is a pre-established purpose in nature, he is skeptical. Every living being, in his view, realizes a certain purpose on the basis of its own nature, and this purpose is not something planned a priori but is set by itself according to a given environment and time. Han pays attention to the role of reason in this kind of setting of goals and purposes. According to him, reason objectifies the purpose inherent in itself. This makes an individual’s life not arbitrary or instinctive but follow a certain purpose. As to the origin of life, Han introduces

genetics and evolutionary theory on the one hand and stresses, on the other, that humans are the most noble of all living beings because they have self-consciousness and rationality. On religion, he tries to provide a rational interpretation, based on the works of Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Edward B. Tyler, and William James.

Han's philosophical endeavor could be said to be an effort to rationally understand man and world. This rationalistic attitude is found not only in his eagerness to introduce the gains of scientific research into philosophical discussion, but also in his conception of human life. Han makes a distinction between two different attitudes towards life: hedonism and rationalism. Hedonism is, in his understanding, an attitude toward life that thinks that what really exists is our visible reality and the present time, and we should enjoy these entities. Rationalism is an attitude that abstains from present pleasure and lives according to one's own duty. Hedonism is present-centered and agonistic, and regards money as a means to achieving life's goals. Rationalism is future-centered, and regards rational judgment and duty as more important in life. According to Han, hedonism has the advantage of evaluating visible reality so highly that a hedonist will focus on the work of today for today and forget tomorrow. Nevertheless, hedonism has two disadvantageous sides: it does not consider the future and it makes money an end in and of itself. In contrast, rationalism has the advantage that it considers the future as more important and makes universal thinking possible. Cosmopolitanism is the product of a rationalistic attitude of life. Although rationalism has a disadvantage in that it thinks of the future more than the present, it is inevitable and natural to maintain a rationalistic view of life, according to Han. He writes:

Thinking is for the sake of future. Progress begins with complaint. Complaint about the present state comes from thinking about the future (Han, 1936: 223).

Han does not make an explicit choice between hedonism and rationalism. However, he leans more to the side of rationalism. Yet in his conception of a mature life, pleasure represents the content of life and reason the form of life. He calls this "rational eudaimonism," a "proper" attitude to life. In Han, we can see a rupture from tradition, a rational attitude of life, and above all, a rational way of seeing the complexity of human life by means of philosophical thinking.

Another group of philosophers, including Sin Namch'öl, Pak Ch'iu, and Pak Chonghong, was more subjectivistic and more passionate in their way of approaching reality by means of philosophy. They are less interested in the rationalistic tradition of philosophy than they are committed to a subjective, more engaged way of understanding reality. For instance, Pak Ch'iu diagnosed his time as being one of "crisis" and thought that crisis was not an objective state of affairs, but only appeared as crisis when it was identified subjectively as such (Pak, 1934: 13). One of the modern crises he found was the "struggle between wealth and poverty." One should be "subjective" in understanding this kind of struggle. "Subjective" in this case means passionate, opposing, interactive, and practical. Subjective engagement with reality is, in this sense, about confronting reality passionately, with opposition, interactively and practically. Pak thought that the class struggle and the struggle between wealth and poverty could be overcome by the subjective way of conceiving reality. One gets an impression that, in this way, in his philosophy the sensual element remains and the rational element is excluded completely. The justification for this judgment seems to be found in the fact that Pak Ch'iu contrasts reason and passion, or *logos* and *pathos*. Our first impression is, however, wrong. Pak's original point is reflected in his saying: "All practices are action, but all actions are not practical" (Pak, 1934: 14). For this he required a rational element as a criterion for distinction between action and practice. For Pak, action *μετά τοῦ λόγου*, viz., action according to *logos* (i.e., reason) is a true practice. That is to say that only rational action alone is practical. From this, Pak concluded that it is impossible to overcome crisis by means of blind passion, even

though a passionate and pathetic engagement or commitment is needed. Pak describes the relation between logos and pathos as follows:

Subjective conceiving of reality is therefore pathetic and when it reaches at the end, viz., the praxis, it inevitably steps over into the rational sphere. Here is the dialectic of logos and pathos. Praxis is a dialectical union of both of them. And so, these two, viz., logos and pathos take a role as the moments of praxis. Pathos (or action) is the power of praxis and logos is its compass (Pak, 1934: 15).

As to the interrelation of logos and pathos, Pak Chonghong is not so far from Pak Ch'iu. Pak Chonghong, in his paper in 1934, writes as follows:

Our philosophical quest did aim for neither the knowledge of the Platonic "Idea" nor the knowledge of God. It was to conceptually conceive actual reality, starting from actual existing reality. It is, therefore, good in our everyday life to live our life of social praxis, viz., our social sensual activities. [...] It is the task we are now facing to know in which mode and in what quality our life of social praxis is conditioning and determining our understanding of actual reality (Pak, 1998: 335).

Pak Chonghong points out that λόγος in the Greek sense cannot be a primary passage to understand reality because it remains in a passive contemplation, even though it saves phenomena and fixes them in terms of concepts. According to Pak Chonghong, things could be conceived by active praxis, and there is no other way apart from praxis to find a real passage to reality. Pak argues this in the following way:

Conceiving reality cannot be done apart from through praxis. It can be done by active intervention. Even very simple sensation is not a product of a mere contemplation, but a product of sensible praxis (Pak, 1998: 336).

Pak thinks that not only the external world but also humans in themselves cannot be conceived apart from through sensibility. Yet Pak does not neglect the rational element in an active and subjective conception of reality. He does not forget that praxis is conditioned by reason. He recognizes that if the law we discovered in connection with a certain event is true, it is possible that we can cause or produce the event by means of that law. Theory and praxis thus condition each other. Praxis can develop "under the direction of theory" and developed praxis requires a theory in a new stage. Theory develops praxis and theory at the same time, and developed theory requires the praxis of a new stage. "Theory and praxis develop each other in this way. Theory can be never separated from the practical base of the reality," says Pak Chonghong. This conception of the relation between theory and praxis, on the one hand, between reason and sensibility, on the other hand, leads him to dream of the possibility of "our" philosophy, that is, of Korean philosophy. In 1933, Pak lamented that he had nothing to say about "contemporary" Korean philosophy and expressed his strong wish, in the near future, to have a Korean philosophy which was based on, and started from, the concrete reality of Korea and the Korean people.

Summary and Conclusion

I began with the question of why the first Korean philosophers did not seem to find Western philosophy unfamiliar. My answers were threefold. First, though almost all of the first Korean philosophers personally underwent a traditional Confucian education, their official education was provided by a modern school system with a new curriculum according to the Western classification of knowledge. Their way of seeing things, raising questions, and seeking answers was formed by

this modern education system. The first Korean philosophers were thus already under the influence of Western culture. Second, Western philosophy had already been introduced to Korea either by Korean intellectuals who studied in Japan or by Japanese professors at Keijō Imperial University. The first Korean philosophers learned philosophy as they learned mathematics, physics, psychology, or sociology. Third, most prevalent philosophies, or philosophies in fashion at the end of the 1920s and the beginning of 1930s were *Lebensphilosophie*, Marxism and existentialism. These philosophies were focused on human social and existential reality.

My second question concerned Korean philosophers' motivations for doing philosophy. I showed that the philosophers I mentioned were motivated by their interest in actual, concrete reality. Their philosophy was fundamentally reality-oriented. This reality-orientedness had to do with their wish to plant modern forms of life on the Korean peninsula. What was philosophy then for them? Doing philosophy was for them an act of cultivating a culture of modernity; of realizing the power of rationality and subjectivity to transform reality. Doing philosophy was their way of modernizing personal and social lives.

My third question concerned their method of doing philosophy. I discussed two directions. One group of philosophers was interested in finding rational explanations of reality. They tried either to find a logical structure to reality or a more holistic world and life view (*Welt- und Lebensanschauung*). Politically and socially, they were more conservative and liberal. After the liberation of Korea from Japan (1945), they played a role in establishing a liberal democracy in South Korea. An became the first minister of education. Han became a counsel to the American military interim government and gave radio lectures on democracy. He was kidnapped to North Korea during the Korean War (1950–1953). Another group of philosophers was interested in developing a passionate and revolutionary change to social reality. They tried to change and transform reality, at least in their ideas. After liberation, all except Pak Chonghong joined the communist party and worked together with North Korea. Sin went to North Korea; Pak Ch'iu, who became a North Korean military officer, was killed during the Korean war. In this way, the first Korean philosophers were already familiar with the struggle between the Marxist and liberal understandings of the world and of humanity, even though they lived in the time of Japanese occupation. The first Korean philosophers provide us with a kind of mirror in which we can look at ourselves with these questions: what might we expect from philosophy and what is the role of philosophers in a very rapidly changing world like our own?

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