

Special Feature

From Sinocentrism to Civilization Discourse

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Introduction

The dichotomy of the civilized people and barbarian people formed an integral part of the East Asian worldview. This worldview persisted through the period of Western expansion from the sixteenth century. Though there were many contacts with Westerners, East Asians continued to believe that the fundamental dichotomy of civilized and barbarian could not be changed. Although this worldview collapsed rather gradually, the impetus came with the momentous changes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Events such as the defeat of the Qing dynasty in the Opium War, the “opening” of Japan under the American threat, and the “opening” of Korea under the Japanese threat rendered the civilized-barbarian dichotomy irrelevant in explaining the ongoing present realities. East Asians therefore needed to reconfigure their worldview through such events. What changed? What continued? What was the reason for the irreversible overthrow of traditional Sinocentrism and adoption of what they previously considered to be barbarianism?

I believe three East Asian intellectuals who lived through a similar time period with a similar problematique could help to provide an opportunity to explain this change of attitudes. Qing China’s Kang Youwei (1857-1927), Japan’s Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901), and Joseon Korea’s Yu Giljun (1856-1914) all thought Western civilization to be a more advanced civilization. However, the eventual aims the three men sought were not the same. From the revitalization of Confucianism (Kang Youwei), the permanent separation from the tradition of Confucianism through “de-Asianization” (Fukuzawa Yukichi), to the pursuit of a modern independent state without abandonment of traditional Confucianism (Yu Giljun), these three representative intellectuals of East Asia display how the traditional mentality formed during the premodern period continued to influence the modern transformation. It, in other words, displays how the weight of Confucianism and its solutions in East Asia continue to influence them into modernity. Through an analysis of the period of transformation we can obtain an opportunity to understand the different paths the three nations took.

Variations of the East Asian Civilized-Barbarian Dichotomy

It is well known that the Chinese, after building an ancient civilization in the Yellow River valley, called their culture *huaxia* (Chinese civilization) and maintained an ethnocentric perspective and worldview for thousands of years thereafter. Mencius expressed the Sinocentric perspective as the following:

While I have heard of using the Chinese laws to transform the way of barbarians, I have not heard of Chinese laws being transformed by barbarians. Chen Liang is a man of Chu. He admired the teachings of Zhou Gong and Confucius, so he moved north to China to study there. The scholars of the north (China) could not compete with him, so he therefore is a heroic scholar. Your brothers followed his teachings for decades, and, now that the teacher is dead, betray him! (Teng Wen Gong I, *Maengjajipju*)

Although the above quote is directed towards Chen Xiang's following of Xu Xing who adhered to the agricultural school, it reflects deep-rooted Sinocentrism. Confucian thought forms the core of the Chinese mentality. While Confucianism has multiple roots, its initial cast was first formed during the process of formalizing the religion and politics of the Zhou era. It was systematized by Confucius during the Spring and Autumn period, and became one of major Chinese philosophies by the Warring States period. By the Han period, Confucianism became officialized, fully embraced by the State as the orthodox philosophy. While the Masters of the Chinese Central Plains were changed a number of times thereafter, the notion of Sinocentrism inherent in the civilized-barbarian dichotomy was hardly changed.

In Korean history, it is true that the ancient Koreans sought to accept and adopt the relatively more advanced Chinese culture. However, the tendency to socially and historically idealize Chinese civilization as a whole does not emerge until the mid-Goryeo period. Up until then, the Buddhist worldview fascinated the ancient Koreans.

Confucianism was transmitted to Korea and Japan during the Three Kingdoms Period and the Taika Reform Period, respectively, functioning as a method of communicating with the Chinese dynasties. By the mid-Goryeo

period, however, Confucianism becomes ideologically and intellectually important in Korea. However, in Japan, on the contrary, Confucianism did not receive much attention before the era of Tokugawa Bakufu.

The Sinocentrism I discuss in this article refers to standardization of Zhou era rituals by Confucius according to Confucian norms. The most representative text is *Chunqiu* (The Spring and Autumn Annals), which displays the thoughts of Confucius well. One of the most representative assertions of *Chunqiu* is “Venerate the king and drive back barbarians.” This is perhaps representative of Sinocentrism. The question here is how to differentiate the civilized people and barbarian people. If one accepts this thesis, one must include oneself as one of the civilized. If not civilized already, one must work to become civilized. In this sense, Korea and Japan can be thought of having taken different paths.

From the mid-Goryeo period on, Korea idealized China and actively sought cultural assimilation. Particularly from the time of the introduction of Neo-Confucianism in the late Goryeo period, Korean elites began to think of themselves as belonging in the Sinosphere. China was also aware of this development. For example, the Song dynasty, which maintained diplomatic relations with Goryeo Korea, even named the accommodation quarters of the Goryeo embassy “little China.” Joseon Korea’s perception of itself belonging in the Sinosphere began then and intensified during the Joseon period. Yi Hwang, for example, claimed that “Ming China is the suzerain of the world and other nations must submit to it” (*Toegyje jeonseo* 1843). Contrarily, it is worth noting that Joseon Koreans were often scornful towards their neighbor to the east, Japan. Here is a quotation from one of such Korean.

To think of this filthy country, it is indeed a kind of those with weird eyes. It is a land where traces of King Wu never reached. It was not even close being an orbit of Zhou. It wasn’t included in Yan Shigu’s *Huayitu*. Liu Zongyuan left it out of his *Fengtujì*. (Gang 1599)

After the Joseon dynasty’s defeat at the hands of the Qing, Confucian scholars of Joseon became even more exclusive. Song Siyeol preached the civilized-barbarian dichotomy, and that “the center” changes with the times to assert Korean cultural supremacy (*Ganseo jabrok, Songja daejeon*,

vol.131). This attitude did not change until Korea's "opening" in 1876.

Scholars in our country worshipped only Zhu Xi for the past five hundred years. Those who deviated from Zhu Xi were eliminated as traitors. Those who used the discourses of Buddhism and Daoism on the civil service examination papers were banished without pardon. Because of the severity of the laws, everyone, regardless of status worshiped Zhu Xi only. Rulers fulfilled the ruler's obligations, officials fulfilled the official's obligations, elder brothers fulfilled the elder brother's obligations, younger brothers fulfilled the younger brother's obligations, husbands fulfilled the husband's obligations, and wives fulfilled the wife's obligations. As we've always followed the ways of Confucius and Mencius, we could not have been distracted by other trickeries. Then Kyuki Ryuichi nodded his head (Kim 1876).

It is worth noting that Japan did not perceive itself to be a member of the Chinese cultural sphere. The perception of cultural independence was comparatively stronger in Japan. The fact that the Japanese did not internalize Confucianism as the dominant school of thought is an important factor here.

According to the *Book of Sui*, the Japanese even used the following expression in a sovereign's message to the Sui emperor: "The Son of Heaven in the land where the sun rises addresses a letter to the Son of Heaven in the land where the sun sets" (Dongyi, *Suishu*). Japan, even before the Tokugawa Bakufu, having a Buddhist worldview, considered herself as the center of the world. Japan knew of China's Sinocentrism, and employed it for its own sake and purposes. Therefore, Japan's ethnocentrism can be seen as another civilized-barbarian dichotomy.

The Japan-centered dichotomy of civilized and barbarian did not change even after Neo-Confucianism was accepted in the Tokugawa Bakufu era. For example, Yamazaki Ansai (1586-1682), the head of the Kainan school of thought, argued that he would fight against the army of Confucius if he invaded Japan. Arai Hakuseki argued that their politics were the best. Ogyu Sorai (1666-1728) criticized Neo-Confucian scholars arguing that, according to the Confucian perspective, "the rulers must do anything they can do comfort the people, even if it is something that deviates from the norms" (Maruyama 1998:197).

Due to its freedom from Sinocentric Confucianism, a Japan-centered *kokugaku* (National study) developed in Japan. Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801), for example, believed Japan to be *shinkoku* (the heavenly nation). In his work, *Naobinomitama* (1771), Motoori argued that *Karagokoro* (Chinese mind) must be eradicated from the Yamato spirit in order to cure Japan from being diseased (Jo 2001:156). In *Tamakatsma*, criticizing Sinocentrism, Motoori argued that *magokoro* (true mind) could only be recovered when a border between Japan and other countries is properly established (Jo 2001:155). Following Motoori, Hirata Atstane (1776-1834) argued that Chinese studies is only one of many academic subjects; he sought to strengthen Japanese belief in Shintoism (Asukai 2002:74). In other words, a Japan-centered Sinocentrism was developing.

Attitudes toward Acceptance of “Civilization”

Given these conditions, there were obvious differences between the three nations as they accepted civilization and/or enlightenment. The word “civilization” was not new, as the Chinese from early on thought of themselves as the “civilization.” In Chinese civilization, letters contrast with both substance and power. To put it differently, rule through “teaching” without relying on exercises of power was seen as civilized. Liu Zongyuan therefore stated that “the path is illuminated by letters.” In other words, “civilization” in China meant realization of Confucian teachings.

With the arrival of the Western powers beginning in the sixteenth century, the question of how to view the West emerged. China saw them as barbarians. In this aspect, both Joseon Korea and Tokugawa Japan did not differ.

As China from the late Ming period had to (at least partially) recognize the superiority of Western sciences, there were scholarly discussions on how to harmonize them with Sinocentrism. Ruan Yuan, who was the governor of Guangdong province during the 1820s, argued for “reforming a regime by depending on the ancients,” positing that Western sciences have their roots in ancient China. In this way, Ruan Yuan sought to utilize Western sciences from a Sinocentric perspective.

Certain reformist officials (Jinwen school) went further, believing

in the absolute need for reform. Gong Zizhen (1792-1841) advocated for reform, Wei Yuan (1794-1857) argued that the ancient dynasties of China—Xia, Shang and Zhou—were irrecoverable and stressed the need for self-strengthening over emphasis on Confucian classics. Lin Zexu wrote *Haiguo tuzhi* (Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms), arguing for the need to “learn barbarians’ special skills and govern barbarians” (Chen and Li 2004:502).

The Opium War began to reverse the concept of “civilization” in China, as Britain militarily defeated China. But as a result of the Second Opium War, China was forbidden to officially call Western powers “barbarians.” Thereafter, the Self-Strengthening Movement took off in the Qing dynasty. However, the Self-Strengthening Movement was essentially a conservative movement aiming to preserve the existing dichotomy between civilized and barbarian. While it sought to learn specific techniques of the West, it could not escape from the ideology that China was superior to the others. Therefore, Zhang Zhidong’s 1880s slogan, “Chinese learning as essence and Western learning as skill” was essentially an expansion of Zhu Xi’s Neo-Confucianism.

In Joseon Korea, the dominant position sought to maintain Zhu Xi Neo-Confucianism while repulsing Western learning. While certain differences remained, the central issue was whether to take a fundamentalist approach in maintaining Sinocentrism or adopt Western learning at a superficial level. It was a choice between *Wijeong cheoksa* (Defend Orthodoxy and Reject Heterodoxy) and *Dongdo seogi* (Theory of Eastern Way-Western Means). Instead of being an irreconcilable confrontation, they were essentially two axes, in and out of the government, that supported the existing system. Most of Confucian scholars outside of government and lower-ranking officials, who were comparatively less informed about world affairs, tended to support *Wijeong cheoksa*. Most representative of this camp is Choe Ikhyeon. His position was expressed as the following:

Scholars are those who brighten the righteousness and morals to assist the king. Farmers are those who produce millet, rice, hemp cloth, and silk and supply those above. Artisans are those who produce the tools for everyone. Merchants are those who circulate and distribute commodities that are not readily available. Specific rules exist for all their clothes, food, living

quarters, and movements. There is not a single aspect of life where rules do not exist.

All of those orders were the reason why the standards were created through laws. That was called *huaxia* (Chinese civilization). *Huaxia* means civilization, a state in which laws and norms are brightly civilized.

The barbarians already live at a remote and secluded location, and therefore their natural energies are not balanced. Their people therefore tend to be less righteous and more cunning. To speak of the present conditions, while they have basic conditions of humanity, they cannot perform the core values as greatly or precisely as did the sages of Chinese civilization. While they have cardinal hierarchies between the father and son, the ruler and subject, the elder and younger, and between friends, the contents of their relationships are not as sincere or scrupulous as the examples of Chinese sages. Their learning therefore only focuses on instruments. They are cruel and insolent, and do not study anything about improving one's nature through studying. Those who've lost the way and paid attention to harmful effects of lowly recent trends are easily captivated by new and strange techniques (of the Westerners). They praise the Western techniques saying they are better than the laws of Yao, Shun and the three Kings. Thinking that such things are "Civilization and Enlightenment," they do not know that they are entering into a dark tunnel. (Choe 1898)

The officials in government who unwillingly had to accept Western civilization, like Zhang Zhidong, sought to place it within the traditional Neo-Confucianism of Zhu Xi. Therefore they sought to discover the evidence of the superiority of the Chinese civilization from Confucian classics by interpreting, in a new way, "Civilization and Enlightenment." Kim Yunsik, for example, recognized it was "transformation by development, urgent business" (Kim 1891). A story told by *Tongnip Sinmun* during the era of Pro-Russian cabinet with Sin Giseon heading the Ministry of Education, following the event of the royal refugee at the Russian legation, is a good example of the position of *Dongdo seogi* followers.

The Minister of Education Sin Giseon reported, saying shaving hair and wearing a suit is a way to be a barbarian. Using the vernacular and abolishing the language of the Qing is not right, and using the foreign solar calendar and abolishing the calendar given by the Qing emperor is unjust. Cabinet officials discussing state affairs and executing them is in effect

taking power from the king and giving it to the people. All were done by the traitors of the previous government. (*Tongnip Sinmun* June 4, 1896)

Given these conditions, “Civilization and Enlightenment” was something that had to already exist. Nam Gungeok, therefore, interpreted “Civilization and Enlightenment” using languages of *Zhouyi* and *Liji*. To the end of nineteenth century, only a handful of Qing China and Joseon Korea officials openly sought adoption of Western “Civilization and Enlightenment.” Most officials actively or passively sought to sideline Western learning vis-à-vis Neo-Confucian orthodoxy.

In contrast, Japan clearly recognized the need for reform. They had already experienced the importance of Western civilization through their sustained contact with the Dutch and the development of *Rangaku* (Dutch studies). Japanese intellectuals recognized the power and wealth of the West and sought to discover its origins. In doing so, they realized that it was not limited to mere techniques. Japanese intellectuals recognized that techniques and mentality were not separate.

Japan, therefore, assumed the same stance toward the West that it had held vis-à-vis Chinese civilization. This is what Aizawa Seishisai (born Arizawa Yasushi) proposed in his 1825 work *Shinron* (New Thesis), the concept of *kokutai* (national polity). Finding the source of Western wealth and power from Christianity, Aizawa sought to locate the substitute in Japan with the Japanese emperor as a rallying figure around the population. With deification of the emperor, loyalty began to supersede filial piety. His theory was further developed by Yoshida Shōin (1830-1859) as an ideology emphasizing the Japanese nation-state. By the mid-nineteenth century, a Japan-centered worldview was widespread.

Fukuzawa Yukichi, Kang Youwei, Yu Giljun

We will now mention and discuss particularities of three leading and representative intellectuals of East Asia who sought to tackle and overcome the prevailing tendency to maintain traditional Confucianism or the Eastern way by actively adopting Western civilization. The focus will be on the time around the Sino-Japanese War. In other words, I have selected the time

when the traditional hierarchy and order in East Asia was demolished by one of its own—Japan.

Of course, Fukuzawa was most active of the three in preaching “Civilization and Enlightenment.” Not only was he older, but he also functioned as a mentor for the other two men. His work that compellingly argued for the need to adopt and accept Western civilization was *Seiyō Jijō* (Things Western). In this 1866 work, Fukuzawa made clear his aim of writing:

After knowing the conditions and things of the foreign country, we should decide whether or not to befriend them. Once a friend, we should exchange with them as a civilization, and as an enemy, we should assume the martial way in dealing with them. One should not make a mistake in using of literary and martial arts. (Fukuzawa 1866:7-8)

As can be seen from the expression above, civilization is described as something acting as a counterpart to the armed forces. It is not different from the traditional East Asian concept of civil administration. Fukuzawa, in his 1875 work *Bunmeiron no gairyaku*, said “discourse on civilization is a theory of human mental development, with the goal of advancement of the masses. That is why discourse on civilization is also called “development of mass mentality” (Gu 2001:39). However, in his work written following Korea’s Gapsin Coup, *Datsu-A Ron* (Leaving Asia), Fukuzawa describes civilization, not in the traditional sense, but as a comprehensive order encompassing both the mental and physical. It is here that Western civilization is seen as modern civilization.

Modern civilization and Japan’s old civilization stand at two extremes. If we were to depart from our old beliefs and approaches, we must also abolish our government. If we obstruct this invasion of civilization, Japan cannot maintain its independence. There is no possible way that the struggle of the world civilization would permit this lonely island of the East to slumber in isolation. My Japanese countrymen, it is our principle to recognize the need of the country over the weight of the government. Through the reliance of the Imperial Household’s dignity, we shall overthrow the old government and establish a new one. Everyone in the country shall completely adopt the modern Western civilization. (It is from doing so) not only that Japan

may strip away its old self, it will create a new center in the entire continent of Asia, and this is where the essential ideology of the mere two words of “Datsu-A” – depart from Asia – lies.

While our country is located in East Asia, the mind of its nation already left the conservatism of Asia and joined the civilization of the West. (Fukuzawa 1885)

Fukuzawa’s position and understanding of the situation around him eventually ends with the assertion that Japan must lead Asia in place of China (Han 2002:21-33). This perspective is also evident in the writings of Mutsu Munemitsu (1844-1897), who was the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time of the Sino-Japanese War. Here is his perspective on Chinese and Japanese civilizations:

(1) Always received benefits from China in terms of civilization. China was an advanced nation while Japan was a backward nation. (2) Western civilization came to the Far East and Japan adopted Western civilization and succeeded in reforming itself. New Japan succeeded in restoration. While old Confucian scholars think of China as the model of civilization and the biggest country, they now think of China as an unawakened country of conservatism. China scoffs at Japan as a small island nation superficially and imprudently imitating Western civilization. (3) The confrontation between China and Japan is fundamentally a confrontation between the new civilization of the West and the old civilization of the East. (Mutsu 1994:65)

Compared to Japan’s wholehearted acceptance of Western/modern civilization, Kang Youwei advocated the most radical reformist ideas in China. What relationship does this reformism have to China’s traditional Sinocentrism?

Kang Youwei memorialized the throne on May 2, 1895, arguing for the end of humiliating peace negotiations. Additionally, he proposed programs of reform. However, what is the essence of his thought? His thought is revealed in his *Kongzi gai zhi kao*. Instead of a scholar, Kang Youwei recognized Confucius to be a sage and a founder of a religion.

The sage’s meanings are profound! Deep! Wide! Big!

The emperors, officials, and Confucian students of Western and Eastern Han, while they self-claimed to respect the way the disorders of the Spring

and Autumn period were treated, did not follow them through at all. While the sage created the sprouts, Liu Xin's *Zoushixue* (The Commentaries of Zuo studies) disrupted them. At this time, Confucius was degraded from the status of a sage to a mere teacher. Studying of Confucius was stopped, his ideas stopped circulating, and the teachings of his generation subsided. Our civilization were mixed with Buddhism and Laozi's literary rhetoric of Wei, Jin, Sui, and Tang dynasties, and were disrupted by the Dis, Qiangs, Tujues, Khitans, and Mongols. The people of China therefore even forgot the fact that they were in a ruinous state. Therefore the people of China suffered from savage kings and barbarians for the past two thousand years. It is sad! (Kang 1898)

In the end, while Kang Youwei sought reform, he was still immersed in Sinocentrism. In the end, he was unable to abandon the autistic view that seeks origins and products of all things from the realm of Chinese culture.

On the other hand, Joseon Korea's Yu Giljun displays a comparatively advanced attitude. How Yu Giljun became more advanced than Kang Youwei is easy to understand if one examines Yu's background.

As a descendant of the prestigious Gigye Yu family living in the Bukcheon area of Seoul, he was fairly exposed to world affairs. Most importantly, he joined Bak Gyusu's lectures from 1874, during which Bak recommended that Yu read Wei Yuan's *Haiguo tuzhi* and study current affairs. He was also the first Korean student to study abroad in Japan and the United States. Convinced that Chinese classics were useless, he gave up on the civil service examination in 1875. Entering the movement of "Civilization and Enlightenment," he went to study in the United States with state support. Returning after the Gapsin Coup, he was immediately placed under house arrest. He wrote *Seoyu gyeonmun* while under house arrest (Kim 1998:401-409). Though he began writing in 1882, a portion of the manuscript was stolen in 1883. Restarting in 1887, he completed the manuscript in 1889. His house arrest was partially revoked in November of 1892. He was sent to Japan as a part of the official mission during the Sino-Japanese War in October 1894, and he gave the manuscript to a Japanese publisher. In the end, it was published in April 25, 1895 by Fukuzawa's publisher Goshunsha (Yu 1895:3-8).

Due to these reasons, the content of Yu Giljun's *Seoyu gyeonmun* displays an almost identical positive stance toward Western civilization to

that of Fukuzawa. What is notable here is that he was deeply impressed by conditions in Japan and sought Korea's own modernization following Japan's example.

While it has been 200 years since Japan had commercial relations with the Netherlands of Europe, the contact with the Dutch was limited to a provincial city due to the perception among the Japanese that the Dutch were barbaric. After establishing treaties with the nations of Europe and Americas, however, the Japanese attained wealth and power within thirty years through seizing Westerners' strong points and imitating their laws and institutions (Yu 1895:3).

As can be seen from the expression above, Yu wrote *Seoyu gyeonmun* hoping that Korea could follow the Japan's example and attain the aim of being a "rich and strong country" Therefore, Yu saw "Civilization and Enlightenment" as a utopian project (Yu 1895:395). Knowing the Five Relationships and how to behave is the "Civilization and Enlightenment" of behavior and studying all things is academic "Civilization and Enlightenment." As can be seen from a list of "Civilization and Enlightenment" of politics, law, machines and products (Yu 1895:395-396), he saw "Civilization and Enlightenment" not as something that is narrowly bounded, but as something encompassing all domains.

However, there were only a handful of people who supported "Civilization and Enlightenment." His interesting categorization of the different attitudes people have toward "Civilization and Enlightenment" may be summarized as follows:

Owners of Civilization: Those who assert "Civilization and Enlightenment" and execute the tasks of it.

Guests of Civilization: Those who are envious of "Civilization and Enlightenment" and are happy to learn about it.

Slaves of Civilization: Those who fear and hate "Civilization and Enlightenment" but are forced to follow it.

Transgressors of Civilization: Those who cannot keep the good points of their country while admiring the foreigners.

Enemies of Civilization: Those who consider foreign nations to be treasonous and ignore their products of civilization.

Morons of Civilization: Those who consume the products of foreign

nations without even knowing anything about them. (Yu 1895:395-404; summarized by the author Kwon)

This is, without question, a sharp critique of Joseon Korea's conditions at the time. For Yu Giljun, the West already became the standard of civilization. East Asia was either half-civilized or barbarian. Through such positions, we can see that Korea's reformist officials took on similar perspectives to those who executed the Japan's Meiji Restoration. Joseon Korea, which previously agreed on China's position now, sought accord with the West and Japan. In this perspective, the dichotomy between civilized and barbarian is reversed from the previous Sinocentric perspective. Seo Jaepil, who was a participant in the Gapsin Coup of 1884, began printing *Tongnip Sinmun* after his return from study abroad in the United States. In an editorial of *Tongnip Sinmun*, he sought to explain the difference between civilization and barbarism through the following article.

The most pathetic lives are those of the Korean women. I speak to the Korean people on behalf of these pathetic women. Women are not in any way lower than men. The men treating women low is nothing but an expression of our barbarism. How is mistreating women only relying on physical strength any different from being a barbarian? (*Tongnip Sinmun* April 21, 1896)

This argument is specifically that Korea's civilization, which sought to repress women with the Three Bonds and Five Relationships of Confucianism, was nothing but a form of barbarism.

Conclusion

The variations of the Sinocentric dichotomy between civilized people and barbarian people and the acceptance of it reveal differences in mental attitudes in the three nations of East Asia. In building its worldview, China, claiming to be the origin of civilization, placed itself in the center while sidelining other nations around it. Korea and Japan, recognizing ancient Chinese civilization as comparatively more advanced, sought to adopt it. However, differences in geographic and historic environments produced

important differences in the adoption of Chinese civilization between the two nations.

The mentality of Chinese Sinocentrism can be seen as a form of narcissism. While it can be said that the Chinese remained self-centered, Korea and Japan went through processes of assimilation and internalization. Here, Korea could be said to have sought to over-assimilate Chinese civilization. This mentality can be explained by the concept of projective identification. Excessive efforts of assimilation led to an even greater obsession with the origins of Chinese civilization than in the case of China. However, this project of projective identification eventually ended in collapse. The “success” of assimilation actually caused it to be distanced from the original.

Japan, instead of actively seeking assimilation, separated itself from China. Its geographical distance from China permitted such distancing. Through this process, Japan sought to find its own origin to overcome that of China. Results of such efforts were expressed as theories such as *shinkoku* (heavenly nation) and *kokutai* (national essence). Japan’s mentality, in the end, concluded in its own narcissism.

Psychological responses to the injury created by the impact of Western civilization were not unrelated to the extant mental attitude displayed by Sinocentrism. While China failed to abandon its narcissism and maintained its faith in its origins, Japan radically conducted its subjectivity and assimilated itself to Western culture – creating its own narcissism vis-à-vis others. Korea appears to have switched the object of assimilation at the point of the Sino-Japanese War. While traditionalism may have persisted at the underlying level, the thrust of modern Korean society could be found in this transformation.

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Abstract

The Sinocentric dichotomy between civilized people and barbarian people has long been the worldview of East Asians. Although this view was challenged before, the decisive challenge was posed by the changes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. What was the reason for the irreversible overthrow of traditional Sinocentrism and the adoption of what they had previously considered to be barbarianism?

Qing China's Kang Youwei (1857-1927), Japan's Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901), and Joseon Korea's Yu Giljun (1856-1914) all thought Western civilization to be a more advanced civilization. However, the eventual aims the three men sought were not the same. From revitalization of Confucianism (Kang Youwei), permanent separation from the tradition of Confucianism through "de-Asianization" (Fukuzawa Yukichi), to the pursuit of a modern independent state without abandonment of traditional Confucianism (Yu Giljun), these three representative intellectuals of East Asia display how the traditional mentality formed during the premodern period continued to influence the modern transformation.

The variations and methods of acceptance of the Sinocentric dichotomy of civilized and barbarian played a very important role in the formation of mentalities among the three nations of East Asia.

Psychological responses to the injury created by the impact of the Western civilization were not unrelated to the extant mental attitude displayed by Sinocentrism. While China failed to abandon its narcissism and maintained its faith in its origins, Japan radically abandoned Sinocentrism and assimilated itself to Western culture – creating its own narcissism vis-à-vis others. Korea appears to have switched the object of assimilation beginning at the point of the Sino-Japanese War. While traditionalism may have persisted at the underlying level, the thrust of modern Korean society could be found in this transformation.

Keywords: Sinocentrism, civilization, Kang Youwei, Fukuzawa Yukichi, Yu Giljun