The Myth of the Breakdown of Tradition and Korean Social Science: A Search for Indigenization

Yong-Chool Ha
(The Henry Jackson School of International Studies University of Washington)

Abstract: There is a myth, or a perception that Korean society experienced a sudden rupture of historical continuity and that Korean tradition has been "destroyed." This paper contends that without understanding and overcoming this myth, the indigenization of Korean social sciences is not possible. First, I identify the sources of the myth. Next, I analyze how the myth has actually affected understanding of Korean industrialization, political changes and social development. Finally, the paper concludes with critical suggestions for how to overcome the myth in Korean social sciences and possibilities for indigenization of Korean social sciences. Those suggestions are as follows. First, colonial studies should receive renewed attention from the perspective of understanding how Korean tradition evolved in different forms as suggested earlier. Second, Korean social scientists need to transcend system boundaries. Finally, it is imperative that various findings and arguments pertaining to phenomena which are "distinctively Korean" are collected from different areas and varying levels of analysis to determine the exact locus of Korean studies in terms of indigenization.

Key words: indigenization, tradition, myth, thematic review approach

Korean Social Science Journal, XXXV No. 1(2008): 97~122.

–A tendency to follow Western models exists when we discuss Korean society, but to project the future of Korean based on Western models raises a serious question regarding the linkage between the two. Kim, Youngmo, "Where is Korean Society Heading?"(Seoul: Hyundasahoe Yonguso, 1983)(in Korean), p. 275.

–In what forms do traditional value systems exist? ···We have not conducted a continuous, critical review of the legacies of our tradition. Instead we merely imported (theories and concepts to explain) external outcomes of industrialization from abroad. Park, Youngshin, Ibid., p. 265, 267.

–It is my view that if there groups of scholars use Western concepts and theories, they must explain Korean political reality by way of the concepts developed in Asia and by our past scholars. It is regrettable that the latter is as weak as the Achilles' heel. I believe this weakness is hindering the process of indigenization and Koreanization of Korean political science. Kim, Hak Joon, *Korean Politics: Research Trends and Directions* (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1983)(in Korean), p. 427.

–Political science doing research and teaching in Korea have been busy importing Western concepts, theories and methodologies. Therefore, there is not much difference between reviewing the development of Korean political science and Western political science .Shin, Jonghyun, Political Science in Korea(Seoul: Bommunsa, 1997)(in Korean), p. 8.

–In the cases of political science and sociology, concepts developed by American and European scholars were uncritically applied in explaining social changes in Korea. This led to the failure to explain the political economic dynamics, structure and behavioral process which consequently led to the financial crisis. A

good example in point is the imported Confucian capitalism theory from abroad. This is an extreme case of academic colonialism. Kim, Dong Choon, "Why Could not Korean Intellectuals Read the Present Crisis?" (Korean), *Kyungje wa Sahoe (Economy and Society)*, vol. 37(Spring 1998)

For a long time Korean social sciences have been criticized for their heavy reliance on Western conceptual frameworks and theories in understanding Korean society and politics. The gist of the criticism is that Western theories with little relevance to Korean realties have been too easily adopted, applied and abandoned. As the above quotations indicate, it is clear that the same pattern of applying Western theories and then criticizing these same theories has not changed significantly during the past several decades. Questions and tasks related to "Koreanizing," or indigenizing Korean social sciences have been frequently raised and discussed, but effort to answers to the questions has not so far borne any visible progress. This paper makes an effort to understand the obstacles to progress in developing theories relevant to Korea's realities.

Rather than adopting the conventional method of area and sub-area reviews of social science disciplines, this paper takes a thematic review approach. Specifically this paper locates the major stumbling blocks for indigenizing Korean social sciences in the prevalent and yet unclarified myth of the "breakdown or(severance)" of Korean tradition. The myth of the breakdown of tradition is not easy to pin down, especially because the myth has been accepted without much conscious reflection. This myth is pervasive in the minds of academics as well as the general public. Roughly stated, the myth refers to the perception that Korean society experienced a sudden rupture of historical continuity and that Korean tradition has been "destroyed." It further refers either to the unfounded perception that Korean society is

free of the impact of tradition, or to the neglect in the study of how to understand and approach the role of tradition in social and economic changes. This paper contends that without understanding and overcoming this myth, the indigenization of Korean social sciences is not possible. First, I identify the sources of the myth. Next, I analyze how the myth has actually affected understanding of Korean industrialization, political changes and social development. Finally, the paper concludes with critical suggestions for how to overcome the myth in Korean social sciences and possibilities for indigenization of Korean social sciences.

I. Sources for the Lasting Myth of the Breakdown of Tradition

Two sources of the myth of the breakdown of tradition can be identified; one is historical and the other cognitive. The historical source of the myth is quite well-known: that is the colonial legacy and the ways in which to understand the legacy. The two prevalent interpretations of the nature and impact of colonial rule have reinforced the myth of the breakdown of tradition, though in quite different ways. The so-called nationalist interpretation of the colonial rule (I would prefer to call this the anti-colonial historiography) implanted a strong perception that the colonial rule destroyed Korean tradition. It focuses on political dependency and arbitrariness, social control and repression, economic exploitation and the loss of cultural identity. The exploitation-centered approach correctly places emphasis on the suffering which increased through discrimination and physical and mental controls, but it is not clear what the enduring psychological, institutional and social consequences of this suffering were. In fact, most of these studies are limited to the colonial period itself.[1]

It is not difficult to understand the affinitive relationship be-

tween the view that the colonial rule was primarily exploitative and the view that the colonial rule destroyed tradition. The notion of exploitation is closely connected with that of destruction. It is only natural that the exclusive focus on destruction directs attention away from the close examination of the interaction between the colonial rule and Korean tradition.[2.]

In complete opposition to the first view is the revisionist approach which is largely concerned with positive economic change, modern socio-cultural influences under Japanese rule, and cultural hegemony. Criticizing the first interpretation as being too nationalistic, revisionists trace the colonial origins of Korean economic development and argue that colonial rule left such legacies as the accumulation of capital and infrastructure, and a strong state and a modern bureaucracy. All of these elements became instrumental in designing and implementing Korean economic de-

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* This is a revised version of the paper prepared for the conference; "Korean Studies for the Next Hundred Years: Reflection and Vision"Held at Seoul National University in Seoul, Kore May 31 to June 2, 2006.

1. A critical remark almost colonial studies made in another context is also relevant to the Korean case: "Modernity was never itself the object of a non-teleological criticism. This is what the post-colonial present demands. Rather than the anti-colonial problems of overthrowing colonialism (or the West) what is important for this present is a critical interrogation of the practices, modalities, and projects through which modernity inserted itself into and altered the lives of the colonized." David Scott, "Colonialism: Anthropological Approaches to Colonialism, *International Social Science Journal* 49, 4 (Dec. 1997), p.9.
2. For instance, Shin, Yong Ha regards 1) efforts to wipe out Korean nationality through assimilation and 2) soci-economic exploitation as essential elements of the Japanese colonial rule, thus viewing colonial exploitation and annihilation of tradition on the same level, "A Critique of the Attem to Reconcpetualize "colonial modernity", *Changjak kwa Bipyon*, vol. 98 (Fall 1997, pp. 15-19.

velopment plans in the 1960s.[3]

Problems embedded with the revisionist approach are equally serious. Revisionist research, although arguably an important strand of scholarship, proceeds as if dealing with the economic sector is tantamount to dealing with the whole. Furthermore, it imposes later sociological concepts and categories to characterize Korean colonial society, an extrapolation that fails to acknowledge the unique aspects of Korean colonial society. By linking the past colonial era to the present in terms of institutional continuity such as a strong state, economic development, and emergence of management styles,[4] revisionists commit the error of "reverse teleology," or reading history backward. Such analyses do not do justice to the complex nature of colonial institutions and society as they actually existed. In particular, their interest in Korean colonial society is limited to explanations regarding post-colonial economic development. It is not surprising, therefore, that these studies have not paid attention to social institutions developed during the colonial era and how they have affected not only society but also patterns of economic development in Korea since that time. Because of their primary interests in economic development and the assumption of colonial modernization based on reverse teleology, the dynamics of Korean tradition during and

3. For detailed discussion of the two positions, see Carter J. Eckert, *Offspring of Empire: The Kochang Kims and the Colonial Origins of Korean Capitalism, 1876-194* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), Chapter 1. The fact that the development-exploitation argument has intensified in proportion to Korean achievement of extraordinarily high and rapid economic growth (in effect, raising the political stakes) again suggests that a political agenda has been interposed between data and theory.
4. Bruce Cumings, "The Origins and Development of the Northeast Asian Political Economy: Industrial Sectors, Product Cycles, and Political Consequences," in Frederic C. Deyo eds., *The Political Economy of the New Asian Industrialization* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

after the colonial rule has not been their major focus of study.

A more recent approach has turned scholars' attention towards demonstrating more discursive aspects of Korean colonialism following the postmodern paradigm. Based on interactions of national, colonial, and modern arenas in colonial Korea, the approach is critical of orthodox approaches and their exclusive focus on nationalistic interpretations of colonial social change. Instead, the discursive approach argues that colonial society was involved in a constant tug of war amongst the national, colonial and modern arenas. Avoiding structural and deterministic analyses, the discursive approach attempts to show how the Korean people, as limited as colonial society was in terms of individual leverage, were not simply coerced, but rather, interacted with other spheres. At the opposite end, Japanese hegemony, again limited as it was, was not completely based on force.[5]

By treating the colonial arena as one of three interacting arenas, the discursive approach underestimates the centrality of the colonial arena when understanding colonial society. Put differently, the colonial arena is subsumed under the interactive aspects of colonial social change. If anything, it has further parceled the field because it chooses cases and situations without keeping colonial peculiarities in mind. Furthermore, this approach, regardless of its original intentions, is bound to be linked to nationalist-revisionist debates. The discursive approach will most likely be strongly identified with the latter because of its emphasis on active history making. Moreover, this approach tends to be critical of the nationalist interpretation of repression and exploitation. In the midst of ongoing emotional polemics, the interjection of this seemingly value-neutral approach confuses rather than enhances our understanding of the colonial situation

5. For example, Shin Gi-Wook and Michael Robinson, eds., *Colonial Modernity in Kore* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999).

in its totality. This approach leaves room for the examination of tradition during the colonial years. However, the discursive approach fails to consider the primacy of the colonial dimension, and therefore, sets limits when approaching the issue of tradition.

The second source of negligence in examining the role of tradition is cognitive and disciplinary in nature. "Cognitive" refers to the intellectual orientation strongly embedded in Korean intellectual tradition. Korean intellectuals have lived under strong pressure both from the outside and the inside since the late 19th century. They had to either defend against or cope with external influences before they were able to change their cognitive maps of the world. The sense of urgency and inferiority were deeply rooted in Korean intellectuals. Under such circumstances, intellectuals have been pressured to present prescriptions for Korean society based on thin analysis. More specifically, intellectuals are pressured to look forward into the future rather than the past. This tendency is applied indiscriminately to both the conservative and progressive intelligentsia. Whether radical Marxists or Spencerian gradualists, the Korean intelligentsia developed a tendency to emulate and idealize the Western world primarily through the prisms of Western theories, ideas, and ideologies. Prescribing remedies for Korean society with little empirical analysis has been a singularly important trademark of Korean social sciences. This makes it very difficult to distinguish intellectual histories from social scientific analyses in the sense that most writings represent assertions without any firm empirical foundation. I would venture to say most works published in the name of social sciences in Korea are closer to intellectual history than social science even to this day. Therefore, what Marxists or functional modernists say about Korean society and politics is more of projections of ideals. Under such conditions, it is only natural that stories of the masses are often neglected or merely assumed without any concrete analysis.

This long-standing intellectual tradition has persisted, influencing present day analyses of Korean society and politics in various disciplines. Thus the understanding of this intellectual tradition is essential in examining how the myth of the breakdown of tradition continues to persist. The most typical myth is Marxist views of Korean society and politics. Although numerous phenomena in Korean history are not amenable to the Marxian paradigm, class-based analyses have been applied to Korean cases.[6] One the one hand, it is understandable how desperate intellectual-turned-activists were pressured to conjure theoretical weapons to fight against repressive regimes, and that the utility of Marxism is perhaps more useful for criticizing reality rather than analyzing or understanding reality. But it is not surprising to note that the image of pressured intellectuals persists in the Marxian paradigms.

In addition to the mistake of direct importation of Western theories, another serious conceptual consequence of the Marxian paradigm is the unintended acceptance of the assumption that industrialization brings about universal social and institutional consequences. In a sense, Marxists are oriented more towards idealistic, wishful thinking of class society rather than Korean realities which more often than not defy class analysis. The assumption of universal social consequences of industrialization leads to another assumption that Korean society is a modern one, thus diluting Bendix's distinction between industrialization and development.[7] Whether consciously promoted or not, the commit-

6. For a collection of papers on different approaches to social differentiation in Korea, see Study Group of Sociology of Seoul National University, *Social Stratification* (in Korean) (Seoul: Tasan, 1991).

7. Reinhard Bendix, "Tradition and Modernity Reconsidered," *Nation-Bulding and Citizenship: Studies of Our Changing Social Order* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964).

ment to leftist versions of modernity leaves little room for the consideration of tradition.

On the opposite end, the same neglect of tradition can be found in functionalist approaches to Korean industrialization. Here one can also detect the effects of commitment to paradigms in shaping one's understanding of complex realities. The application of the modernization paradigm to the Korean case tends to highlight economic and social changes resulting from industrialization. Occasionally, changes are assumed simply because industrialization occurred without specifying the interactive process between industrialization and social changes. Other times, Western frameworks and findings are employed to identity corresponding changes in Korea. The modernization paradigm, for the same structural reasons (universal social consequences of industrialization) as the Marxian paradigm, also does not adequately address the role of tradition. As a result of efforts to understand Korea's distinctive and unique changing patterns through a universal paradigm, tradition is treated either as a residual category or as a factor which explains exceptions to universal changing patterns.[8]

A similar pattern is found in studies of political culture in the field of political science. Political culture is largely understood in terms of values and attitudes. Following the conventional functionalist division between value systems and the division of labor(structure), most studies of political culture are unclear as to whether cultural values and attitudes exist as independent, intervening or dependent variables. Changes in political culture are assumed based on survey results without specifying the process of change. Economic changes are taken for granted and changes are

8. Kim, Kyungdong, *Hanguk Sahoe Byundongno* (Seoul: Nanam, 1993); Hagen Koo, *Korean Workers: The Culture and Politics of Class Formation* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2001).

assumed to emanate from them. Specific processes of interactions between industrialization and political cultural values have not drawn serious attention. At the same time, a clear distinction between political culture and tradition is rarely ever suggested.[9]

Not surprisingly, studies on tradition have been most active in the field of anthropology. What is interesting and important in anthropological studies focused on Korean tradition is that they cover both the values and institutions of Korean tradition. What is problematic, however, is their focus on primarily micro-level phenomena.[10]

Additionally, micro-structural approaches are either too lim-

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9. Lee Ji-hoon, "Some Core Elements of Korean Political Culture," Korean Political Science Association, *Korean Political Science Review,* 16-1, 1982; Han Bae-ho, Ur Soo-young, "Continuity and Change in Korean Political Culture," Korean Political Science Association, *Korean Political Science Review,* 30-3, 1996; Lee Chung-hee, "The Characteristics of South Korea's Political Culture, Political Prises and Power Structure," Korea Association of Public Policy, *Journal of Public Policy,* 4, 1998; Yoo Chung-whan, "Culture and Politics in Korea," Korean Political Science Association, *Korean Political Science Review,* 29-4, 1995.

10. Kim Kwang-Ok, "Structural Changes in Villages and the Nature of Political Structure," *Collection of the Papers in Honor of the Retirement of Professor Kim, Wonryon* no. II (Seoul: Ilchi-Sa, 1987), pp. 723-747 and Lee, Moonwoong, "Adaptation of Workers in the Process of Industrialization," The Institute of Korean Studies (Seoul), *Research Paper* no. 86-4, 1986, pp. 129-161. Jaesok Choi, "Migration and Changes in Clan Structure," A Study Group of Korean Social History, *Status, Class and Social Change in Kore* (in Korean) (Seoul: Munhakkwa Jisongsa, 1987), pp. 246-77. Studies of the urban poor have shown how traditional networks serve as a means of survival, supplementing construction and factory jobs. Hyeong Cho, "A Study of Workers in Urban Informal Sectors in Korea," Korean Institute of Cultural Studies, *Research Proceeding*, vol. 41, 1982, pp. 99-131; Sokryol Hur, "A Study of Urban Illegal Settlements in Korea," M.A. thesis , Seoul National University, 1982.

ited in time scope and regional analysis. Findings are almost too specific, and therefore not linked adequately to the macro-level.[11] Therefore, it is not surprising that changes are sought, assuming the impact of industrialization. Consequently the interactions between industrialization and tradition are not clearly analyzed. In short, a bridge between macro and micro level analyses is lacking in anthropological studies of Korean tradition.[12]

It was President Park Chung Hee's anti-tradition orientation that further reinforced the myth of the breakdown of tradition. Park, from the first days of military rule, made it unequivocally clear that he detested Korea's past records and legacies, or in essence, its tradition. Part of the rationale behind Park's coup d'etat was his desire to drive out past illnesses from the mindset of Koreans and eliminate embedded social practices. He felt a deep sense of shame regarding Korea's past and its lack of effort to industrialize. He attributed all these problems to the lack of resoluteness from political leaders from the past to the present. This made him a "cultural anti-revivalist." Park's detest for Korea's past is unmistakably clear in his following remarks:

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11. For some examples for micro-level analyses of Korean traditional social institutions, Cho, Seong yoon and Cho, Eun, "Hanmal eu gajok gwa sinbun(Family and Social Status)", *Hanguk Sahoesahakhownonmunjip*, vol 50 (Munhak gwa jiseongsa 1996); Kim, Pil Dong, "Gye eu yeoksajok Bunhwa, Baljeon gwajeonge gwanhan siron,(Historical Evolution of the Gye System)" *Hanguk Sahoesahakhoenonmunjip,* vol. 17 (Munhakgwa jiseongsa, 1990); and Moon, Sojeong, "1920-30 nyondae sojaknongga janyodeuleu saenghwalgwa gyoyook(Life and Eduction of Tenant Farmers'Families in the 192-s and 1930s)," *Hanguksahoesahakhoenonmunjip,* vol. 17(Munhakgwa jiseongsa, 1990).

12. For example, Choe, Jae Sok's otherwise informative work on clan organizations demonstrated changes in clan organizations as industrialization progressed, but virtually no hint about negative or positive roles of them. "Migration and Changes in Clan Organizations," *Hanguksaehakhoenonmunjip*, vol. 8 (Munhakgwa jiseongsa, 1987).

"Retreat, crudity and stagnation have marked our 5,000 years of history, beginning from pre-historic Ancient Chosun and continuing through the era of the Three Kingdoms, Unified Silla, and the 500 years of the Yi dynasty. When did our ancestors, even once, dominate the territories of others, seek foreign civilization in order to reform our national society, demonstrate our power of unity to the outside world, and act with independence in the face of others? Always, it has been we who have been mauled by big Powers, assimilated by foreign cultures, impeded by primitive forms of industry, indulged in fratricidal squabbles. Ours has been a history of stagnation, idleness, complacency, accommodation and feudalism."[13]

"While we were sleeping, the world witnessed astounding progress. Not daring to move ahead, we remained content to weave straw ropes. Koryo celadons are just about all we have inherited, and even these were nothing but a hobby of the nobility⋯.Unless we can establish an "economy first" consciousness, our dream of building a strong nation state will end in a dream and nothing more."[14]

It is clear that the myth of the breakdown of tradition has persisted through a variety of unrelated sources. The assumption of the abrupt discontinuity by the anti-colonial historiography was further reinforced by sociological propositions which purported that traditional social structure broke down due to land reforms, the Korean War, and the division of the country. The modernization paradigm treated tradition in a marginal fashion. Moreover, the regime's orientation towards tradition further reinforced the

13. Park Chung-Hee, The Country, The Revolution and I (Seoul: Hollym, 1970), pp.165-166.
14. *Ibid*., p.168.

myth. Intellectual tradition has persisted where Korea's present has been projected via normative goals, prescriptions, or models. In terms of specific approaches to tradition, economic or political changes are juxtaposed with tradition without specifying concrete interaction patterns. Even when the specific processes are dealt with, they are only analyzed at the micro-level. Therefore, the most important questions remain virtually unaddressed: what happens to tradition when traditional political and economic structures are "destroyed" by colonialism. Also, how do social and cultural elements of tradition change, re-emerge, and affect the formation of new political structures. In short, the failure to examine the interaction between industrialization and tradition becomes manifest in the gap between political economy and political sociology in Korean studies.

Ⅱ. The Gap Between Political Economy and Political Sociology

What do I mean by a gap between studies of political economy and political sociology, and how does the study of tradition relate to this gap? The gap lies in the difference in the way the state is treated in political economy and political sociology. The state is not taken seriously in political sociological studies. In contrast, the state is essential when studying political economy. While modernization theory did not consider the role of politics as an independent variable in industrialization, in the NICs, the state initiated and directed rapid economic growth.[15] As a consequence, with the appearance of NICs, the state was "rediscovered" in American social science. This resulted in the

15. On the lack of analysis of politics as an independent variable, see Herbert Blumer, *Industrialization as An Agent of Social Change: A Critical Analysis* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1990).

growth of political economy and numerous studies examining state influence on economic development.[16]

However, most of these studies have not gone beyond an analysis of the role of the state in economic arenas. Partly because of the false division between political economy and political sociology, the drive to "bring the state back in" has stopped short of exploring the social dimensions of the state's involvement in industrialization. In the case of South Korea, while many studies have been conducted on the importance of the state in bringing about "economic miracles", there is a dearth of studies on the social consequences of state-initiated industrialization.

The conceptual tools for undertaking such a study, in fact, have not been adequately developed. While some scholars have tried to incorporate the role of the state and the peripheral status of Korea as unique features of class formulation, often Korea is analyzed using Western sociological terms.[17] Conventional theories of social differentiation, whether Marxist or functionalist, are based on the experiences of societies where the role of the state

16. Theda Skocpol, "Bringing the State Back In," in Peter Evans, Dietrich Ruescheyer, and Theda Skocpol eds., *Bringing the State Back I* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 3-43. For examples of studies on the state's role in economic development, see L. Jones and Il Sagong, *Government, Business, and Entrepreneurship in Economic Development: The Korean Cas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980); Alice Amsden, *Asia's Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); David C. Cole and Young Chul Park, *Financial Development in Korea, 1945-197* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980); Kwang Suk Kim and Michael Roemer, *Growth and Structural Transformation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979); David C. Cole and Princeton Lyman, *Korean Development: The Interplay of Politics and Economic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

17. For a collection of papers on different approaches to social differentiation in Korea, see Study Group of Sociology of Seoul National University, *Social Stratification* (in Korean) (Seoul: Tasan, 1991).

is relatively insignificant. Thus conventional theories only provide a limited understanding of the unique social developments that might have occurred in the process of state-directed industrialization. While conventional sociological categories assume a clear demarcation between political, economic, and social arenas, in state-led industrialized societies, the boundary lines between different institutions are initially ambiguous and systems are only slowly differentiated. The social impact of industrialization in these societies can only be understood properly by looking into the complex interplay between the state and other actors involved in industrialization, and by carefully examining state economic policy. Specifically, studies of Korean industrialization must pay attention to the dynamics of tradition and modernity in state-controlled economic development.

The proper locus and understanding of tradition must begin by acknowledging that industrialization does not bring about universal consequences. Blumer's following remarks of the dangers in uncritically linking social changes to industrialization are painfully germane to Korean studies. He writes:

> "There is a tendency to attribute social changes occurred in the time of industrialization to industrialization itself without specifying interactions between original social conditions and industrialization and to ignore what happens at the points of contact of the industrializing process with on-going group life."[18]

Beyond this general caution in linking industrialization to social change, the real task is understanding the role of the state in economic development and its influence on tradition. Once

18. Herbert Blumer, *Industrialization as an Agent of Social Change: A Critical Analysis* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1990), p. 147.

again Blumer's elaboration of different responses to tradition amidst industrialization is relevant. He suggests five different responses: rejective, disjunctive, assimilative, supportive and disruptive.[19]

The next task is to establish and analyze the process of the interactions between the state and tradition in the course of industrialization. Of particular importance is understanding the institutional prerequisites and implications of lateness in industrialization. Lateness is reflected in institutional and policy formulations by the state in terms of the state's sense of urgency and its sense of inferiority. To understand how tradition engages institutions and policies of late industrialization, a critical reevaluation of the conventional wisdom that rapid industrialization brings about rapid social change is necessary. Rather than automatically accepting the conventional wisdom, close attention should be given to the process of how tradition is reflected in institutional operations and policy formulation. The most important lesson we can derive from the experiences of late industrialization cases is that the more urgent the drive for industrialization, the greater the reliance on familiar institutions, or namely tradition. In other words, without changing our conventional perspective, it is difficult to capture the interaction patterns between the state, tradition and industrialization.[20]

South Korean state-led industrialization was unique. Like other late-industrializing countries such as Germany and Japan, Korea felt a strong backwardness and need for change, and its government was heavily involved in pursuing economic development. As in Japan, Korean industrialization did not face

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19. *Ibid*., p.89ff.
20. Yong-Chool Ha, "Late Industrialization, State and Social Changes: The Emergence of Neofamilism in South Korea," (book in preparation and a paper under review, 2006).

strong social resistance, and state bureaucrats were not tied to land or any economic interests. Therefore, unlike Germany, state bureaucrats were not tied to any strong social groups or classes. Korean bureaucrats were formally recruited based on merit, but in contrast to Japan, the administrative structure was bureaucratically weak. With the breakdown of traditional social structures, political leaders and intellectuals were not significantly influenced by traditional values and institutions. This created the myth that industrialization would bring about modernity as traditional structures such as the landlord system broke down. What was lacking were attempts to understand the mechanisms of social change even after the demise of traditional structures. That is, the breakdown of social structures should not be equated to the end of tradition's role and influence in Korean society.

To understand the role of tradition, our analysis should start from the state. It is necessary to go beyond the conventional political economic approach to the state where the state is understood primarily in functional terms (i.e. the role of the state in economic development). The dynamics of the state in the course of industrialization needs to be understood in terms of its social and institutional changes. In the case of Korea, as with other late industrialization cases, one important institutional prerequisite which affected social and institutional change was the state's ability to secure both competent and loyal people around the top leadership. The next task is to then analyze how the state brought tradition into institutional designs, policy formulation, and policy implementation.

This brief sketch is a clear departure from conventional approaches to culture and tradition. Before highlighting specific differences with conventional approaches, several definitions must be clarified. Culture and tradition should be clearly differentiated. Culture can be defined in several ways. Here it may suffice to adopt Clyde Kluckhohn's definition where culture is defined as

"the total way of life of people."[21] On the other hand, tradition involves something that is handed down and includes material objects, beliefs, images of people and events, practices, and institutions.[22] In relation to our current purpose, tradition can be understood to include institutions, behaviors in terms of images, records, and values. What distinguishes tradition from culture, however, is that aspects of tradition are actively chosen by certain groups or society. Intentional choice, which is involved in the transmission of institutions, behaviors and values, is a distinctive aspect of tradition.[23] What is chosen and what is left out takes on political significance. The chosen traditional institutions, behaviors, and values may come from conscious efforts, interaction with task fulfillment processes, and inertia. The main actors may vary from masses to elites, and the sources of influence for choice can be either domestic or foreign ideas.

A cursory review of the literature on tradition and culture based on this definitional distinction clearly shows that a distinction between tradition and culture is not clearly made. Also perpetuating the myth of the breakdown of tradition is the understanding of tradition as something old and from the past – something preserved in museums. The aspect of intentional choice in tradition has received academic attention only recently under the influence of Western literature.[24]

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21. Quoted in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretations of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p.4.
22. Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) p. 12.
23. Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Kwame Gyekye *Tradition and modernity philosophical reflections on the African experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Carl J. Friedrich, *Tradition and Authority* (London: Macmillan, 1972); J. Hobsbawm and Terene Ronger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

Most available studies of culture and tradition are conducted outside the context of industrialization; tradition and culture are juxtaposed with industrialization, rendering industrialization as an agent for change without analyzing how tradition was adopted, redefined, or reinvented in the actual industrialization process. These processes include personnel policies, decision-making, and policy implementation. One typical example is the debate over Asian values. In these debates, Asian values are typically viewed in functional terms. These debates typically argue that the compatibility of Asian values and state-led industrialization brought about economic success without examining why and how certain aspects of traditional institutions (not only values) had to be adopted in the industrialization process. Such functional approaches face a hard challenge when explaining how the same Asian values changed to undermine the foundation of economic success.[25]

One good example which illustrates not only the gap between political economy and political sociology, but also the shortcomings of current cultural studies in Korean studies is regionalism. The strongly entrenched regionalism in political behaviors of Korean masses and elites has been a thorny question which defies Marxian or Modernist interpretations of Korean politics. The cultural continuity argument provides a simple answer to the problem of regionalism; it is mainly viewed as the continuation of the long historical tradition of regional rivalry. A

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24. In this regard, one Korean artist's remarks are germane here. "Whatever existed in the past is not tradition. Historical artifacts housed in a museum are not all tradition. The kind of tradition we are thinking of is o ask what should be our tradition and to look for it." Cho, Yongjin, "Tradition and Modernity in Korean Paintings, *Jeontong gwa Hyundae* (Tradition and Modernity), (Fall 1999), p. 12.
25. Cha, Seung Hwan, "Myth and Reality in the Discourse of Confucian Capitalism," *Asian Survey*, vol XLIII, No. 3, May/June 2003, pp.485-506

typical political explanation focuses on the Park Chung Hee-Kim Dae-Jung rivalry, while political economic explanations highlight unequal industrial investment in the southwest and southeast regions of Korea.

Tradition and culture are drawn upon as an independent variable which explains regionalism without showing how traditional institutions, behaviors, and values had to be mobilized in the course of industrialization. It is too simplistic to attribute regionalism to one or two past presidential elections. The political economic explanation is not clear about bureaucratic infrastructure which led to decisions resulting in economic unbalances. What is also noteworthy in the current literature on regionalism is the lack of distinction between elite and mass level forms of regionalism. Furthermore, school ties and regional ties are dealt with separately. All these shortfalls can be resolved only when the question of how lateness and the sense of urgency felt by the top leaders is examined. Lateness and a sense of urgency brought about particular patterns of recruitment in the administrative apparatus of the government. Therefore, the pattern of recruitment affected not only certain policies, but the rest of society as well by spreading out the pervasive ethos of regionalism.

Ⅲ. Concluding Remarks

This brief commentary is an effort to break the deadlocked situation in explaining distinct and unique aspects of Korean social phenomena. Much of the discussion has revolved around the normative need for the indigenization of Korean social sciences. One example was the debates on "methodological indigenization" in the late 1970s. The debates did not prove to serve as a useful guide to indigenization. On the contrary, the debates attempted to resolve the task in a misguided direction. However, these debates did alert us to the importance of locating Korean

phenomena. This paper focused on the myth of the breakdown of tradition as a major stumbling block in locating Korean phenomena. Additionally, this paper has shown how our intellectual tradition, historical understandings, and disciplinary orientations have all contributed in perpetuating the myth. It has further pointed out the gap in research between political economy and political sociology because of this myth.

General suggestions were made which may help put an end to the continuation of this myth. Additionally, concrete tasks were proposed to build up indigenized Korean social sciences, and in particular Korean political science. First, colonial studies should receive renewed attention from the perspective of understanding how Korean tradition evolved in different forms as suggested earlier. To achieve this task, the discontinuity of political rule and international sovereignty should not be regarded as the discontinuity of tradition. Colonial rule led to lost opportunities to redefine and reinvent tradition in our own terms, but this does not mean tradition did not affect us. In this regard, colonial studies should not be regarded merely as histories of resistance, nor as stories of the past; they should be treated as foundations for understanding present social, psychological, and institutional identities. It is regrettable that very few scholars in Korean political science take genuine interest in the colonial period.[26]

Second, Korean social scientists need to transcend system boundaries. Following after Western social sciences, a strong myth regarding boundary system lines pervades Korean social sciences. However, it is easy to see how such boundaries become unnecessary in Korean society and politics where the boundary

26. In this regard, recent efforts to study the colonial society of Korea are encouraging. For this, various issues of Hanguk Sahoehaksa nonmunjip (Journal of Korean Social History) Korean Association of Social History, vol. 1-50.

concept was seriously undermined under state-led industrialization.

Finally, three ways of identifying Korean phenomena exist; the first group of phenomena exists only in Korea; the second exists outside of Korea; and the third group exists inside and outside of Korea to varying degrees. The three types do not exist in isolation. We need to locate Korean phenomena in our history and analyze the evolution of Korean tradition, assuming that they are distinctively Korean. However, they should be put to rigorous comparative analysis to avoid academic chauvinism. At the same time, it is imperative that various findings and arguments pertaining to phenomena which are "distinctively Korean" are collected from different areas and varying levels of analysis to determine the exact locus of Korean studies in terms of indigenization. In this regard, I am happy to note that a strong urge exists to establish indigenized social sciences among the present academic generation within and outside of Korea. An indigenized Korean social science has yet to be systematically organized, but studies point towards a budding future. It appears that the new generation of Korean scholars is deeply committed to overcoming the historical ignorance which stems from the discontinuity with our past.

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