THE DISCOURSE OF Sŏnjin’guk:
SOUTH KOREA’S EUROCENTRIC MODERN IDENTITIES AND WORLDVIEWS

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ABSTRACT

Incorporated into the Eurocentric world order, Koreans have represented their national self and the world within the framework of Eurocentric discourses throughout the processes of modernization in changing global and national circumstances. What I call the discourse of 손진구k is a historically constructed knowledge system based upon the relations constructed around the concepts of 손진구k (advanced country) and 후진구k (backward country). It has provided South Koreans with dominant interpretive frameworks of national identities and worldviews in their national developmental processes. One of its most notable characteristics is a hierarchical distinction between 손진구k and 후진구k, in which the former has the latter as its alienated other. As an ideal image, 손진구k has played important roles in guiding the transformation of the Korean society, e.g., as an urgent national goal and central reference points. As previous research is rare, this dissertation aims to answer basic questions about the concept of 손진구k and a system of knowledge constructed around it.

The primary foci of this dissertation lie on the basic assumptions, characteristics, formation and transformation, and historical backgrounds of the discourse of 손진구k. In particular, this study examines its central concepts, classificatory frameworks, contexts of use, and identity constructions; historical conditions of its formation and transformation; contestations over and challenges to it; and its comparison with neighboring East Asian countries’ dominant discourses. Grounded upon the theories of
discourse, hegemony, developmentalism, and Eurocentrism in the global historical context, this study assumes that developmentalism is a global discursive construction reflecting Eurocentric worldviews in specific historical circumstances.

Methodologically, this study employs the discourse analysis of newspaper texts as the main research method with semi-structured interview skills as supplementary one.

As a contribution mainly to global studies, cultural studies, development studies as well as Korean studies, this dissertation shows the following major findings and arguments. First, the discourse of sŏnjin’guk is premised upon a distinction between sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk, into which South Koreans have projected their positive and negative developmental values into them respectively. Second, the discourse has its historical root in the early modern discourses of kaehwa (enlightenment) and munmyŏng (civilization) in terms of Korea’s discursive responses to the Eurocentric world order. Third, the discourse has transformed its connotations and political implications in changing historical circumstances since its rise as a hegemonic discursive system supporting South Korean developmental regime in the 1960s. Fourth, the basic assumptions and ideas of the discourse are challenged and contested in a variety of ways by counter-developmentalist socio-economic groups. And last, the discourse shows South Koreans’ distinctive national identities and worldviews compared with Chinese and Japanese mainstream discourses on national identity.
To Father, Mother, Youngmi, and Wonjun
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INTRODUCTION

“What is the political party that will lead our fatherland to sŏnjinhwâ and sŏnjin’guk, following the wishes of President Park Chung-Hee? Isn’t it the Grand National Party? In order for the Grand National Party to lead our country to sŏnjin’guk, President Lee Myung-Bak should make a success. […] I think that it is the calling of our times that the Grand National Party put South Korea up to the level of sŏnjin’guk by re-taking power for the next term, and also think that there is no other political party than the Grand National Party in South Korea to be able to do it. […] I think that if such a power as the Roh Moo-Hyun government is established again, or if the Democratic Party, leftist party, takes power, our country would eventually fail in entering into sŏnjin’guk. It is my idea that President Lee Myung-Bak should make the basic framework for our country to enter into sŏnjin’guk and, then, it should be done by the next president from our Grand National Party to complete the achievement of sŏnjin’guk. In this way, if we make [GDP per capita] above $30,000, then it is unlikely to drop below $30,000. However, in our times of $20,000, we are unable to enter into full sŏnjin’guk because we are up and down around $15,000 and $20,000. […] Isn’t it that our Grand National Party should re-take power for the next term if it is to upgrade our country to the level of sŏnjin’guk, following the competent Lee Myung-Bak administration? Isn’t it that it should be able to achieve the era of $30,000 in GDP per capita? For this, we should re-take power for the next term.” (Grand National Party 2010)

The controversial statement above recently made by a top-ranked official of the ruling Grand National Party (Hannaradang) well demonstrates the status of the term sŏnjin’guk (advanced country) in contemporary South Korea. In this speech for party members, he emphasized a national need for achieving sŏnjin’guk in relation to his party’s political interests, using the term sŏnjin’guk as many as eight times. The concept of sŏnjin’guk is widely used in South Korea as a national goal to achieve in the near future, as is shown in the statement above, and as other references. Given its popularity and connotative significance, the concept of sŏnjin’guk has been playing very important social and political roles in South Korea. Then, what is sŏnjin’guk? What is its

1 All citations from Korean sources in this study are my own translations unless noted otherwise.
Discourse and Power

Discourse is used in a variety of ways from person to person in different contexts (Mills 1997). I identify three main ways of conceptualizing it: utterance, knowledge, and totality of social relations. When used as utterance, discourse implies various forms of communication through which meanings are exchanged and constructed. Many linguists and social theorists lean to this use of discourse. Dant (1991:7), for instance, defines it as “the material content of utterances exchanged in social contexts that are imbued with meaning by the intention of utterers and treated as meaningful by other participants.” As such, discourse in this use is considered as forms of utterance and communication, or material contents delivered through them. Thus, discourse is not necessarily a systemic idea, and is distinguished from knowledge.

For some, it is not just forms or contents of utterance, but knowledge itself. Foucault (1976), for instance, does not distinguish discourse from knowledge in the sense that both are a formation of regularities among various dispersed elements constitutive of them. For Foucault (1976:49), discourses should be treated not just as “groups of signs” but as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak.” In this respect, he considers discourse as something more than utterance, noting that discourses are “irreducible to the language (langue) and to speech” (Foucault
1976:49). For Foucault, various disciplines of knowledge system such as political economy, biology, psychopathology, etc., are rather identified with the processes of “discursive formation” (Foucault 1976:ch. 2).

For Foucault, dispersed elements become discursive elements through a regularity they obtained. It is the rules of formation that render regularity to those elements. As for the rules of formation, Foucault (1976:38) states that “[t]he conditions to which the elements of this division (objects, mode of statement, concepts, thematic choices) are subjected we shall call the rules of formation” (emphasis in the original). Without these rules there is no discourse but dispersed elements. In this respect, the rules are the very conditions for the existence of the elements of discourse. In this regard, he adds that “[t]he rules of formation are conditions of existence [...] in a given discursive division” (ibid.). Thus, there occurs a discursive formation when dispersed elements take on regularity by being arranged and organized according to certain rules of formation. As a system of rules of formation is not universally applicable, but specific to a certain discourse, it is a constitutive factor of a totality of discursive system.

In this way, Foucault’s concept of discourse focuses on a practice of formation that renders a unity to dispersed elements by setting a system of relations among them according to certain rules of formation. Discourse becomes an interpretive totality that forms discursive objects and determines the positions of subjects whose subjectivities are dispersed too. There are no inherent attributes in discursive objects and subjects, but they are determined by certain relations among them that are set by a certain system of formation. As the system of formation is “a complex group of relations that function as
a rule,” Foucault (1976:74) states that “[t]o define a system of formation in its specific individuality is therefore to characterize a discourse [. . .].”

For other theorists, discourse is understood as virtually equivalent to a system of social relations as no social activity is possible without being grounded upon it. Laclau and Mouffe (1987:82), for instance, consider discourse as “totality which includes within itself the linguistic and the non-linguistics [. . .].” Hence, for them, discourse is not “a combination of speech and writing,” but rather “speech and writing are themselves but internal components of discursive totalities.” Somewhat similar to Foucault, they conceptualize a discourse as an interpretive totality, or “systematic set of relations,” which makes both linguistic and non-linguistic social activities possible. However, their focus of discourse is not just on knowledge, but on general social relations. For them, no social relation or activity is possible without discourse. Therefore, every social activity is discursive and “every subject [and object] position is a discursive position” (Laclau and Mouffe 2001:115).

I consider all of the three definitions of discourse are not only respectively valid in different contexts, but also closely interrelated to one another. For this study, I pay attention to the aspect of discourse that carries more systemic meanings than are delivered in simple utterance. Hence, I employ Foucault’s (1976) notion of discourse as a system of relations among dispersed elements, constituting knowledge. I understand discourse mainly as a system of knowledge conveyed through various forms of
utterances, e.g., newspapers’ written texts. On this ground, this study focuses on the systematic and somewhat constant meanings forming a system of knowledge constructed around the concept of sŏnjin’guk, which I call the discourse of sŏnjin’guk.

In regard to its social roles, discourse is a socially constructed system of meanings and relations, which provides social members with ways of identifying and interpreting the world. In this way, it creates the identities of subject as well as object. For individuals, discourse is an interpretive window through which one can see the world, engage in social activities, and construct her/his identities. In a similar vein, a mainstream discourse in society plays a role as an interpretive framework enabling the society to understand the world, engage in activities with others, and construct its identities.

An aspect of discourse is related to the location of meaning. All of the three aforementioned perspectives on discourse would agree that it is a system of relations, whether a system of language, of dispersed elements, or of social relations. Thus, they see that meanings are produced within the system rather than externally given. For discourse theorists, the claim to truth is valid only within the system of relations, and any claim on universal truth is incompatible with the concept of discourse. Therefore, discourse theorists search for meanings from contexts and relations within the system of discourse. This way of understanding of meaning production process is closely related

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2 In relation to this way of understanding discourse, it is also appropriate to argue that discourse is a totality of social relations. In this regard, Laclau and Mouffe (2001) do not distinguish between discursive and non-discursive practices on the grounds that every social relation is basically discursive. This notion of discourse supposes a far broader range of relations, than the other definitions do. However, this study does not rely much on this notion of discourse as its main focus is on the structure of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk as a system of knowledge reflected in newspaper texts.
to a central thesis of the sociology of knowledge, that is, knowledge is socially
determined (Dant 1991). In this respect, discourse theories and the sociology of
knowledge are in tension with epistemological or scientific traditions of philosophy or
social studies, which assume that knowledge and meanings are objectively existent
outside the contexts of society.

This meta-theoretical assumption of discourse and knowledge raises some
questions about methodology in social studies. As meanings are assumed inherent in the
system of relations, positivist scientific methodology is no longer accepted as the
appropriate way of searching for universal truth. Researchers in the fields of discourse
studies and the sociology of knowledge consider that interpretive, qualitative
methodologies are, rather, proper ways of studying discourse, knowledge, or social
relations. In this regard, Dant (1991:54) notes that “[t]he methods with which the
relation between knowledge and social groups shall be studied are necessarily
interpretative because there are no objective, epistemological criteria which can
arbitrate transhistorically on the nature of truth” (emphasis in the original). In relation to
this, some theorists see society in terms of people’s “everyday life,” which is so
complex and wide-ranging like “landscape,” that any knowledge of it inevitably
involves selective processes reflecting social values and power relations (de Certeau
1988; Hay 1996). In this sense, research activity itself is not free from social contexts,
but is socially situated. It is a practice not of searching for universal truth, but of
meaning production. In this regard, Denzin and Lincoln (2005:x) go further to argue
that “all inquiry is moral and political,” and the practices of qualitative research should help “change the world in positive ways.”

As Foucault (1977, 1980, 2000) notes, knowledge is deeply associated with power, that is, knowledge reflects and exerts power. He states that “[t]he exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power” (Foucault 1980:52). As for the relationship between knowledge and power relation, he notes that “there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (Foucault 1977:27). In this respect, discourse as a knowledge system reflects and constitutes certain power relations. As intertwined with power relations, discourse also becomes a site of social, political, economic, and cultural struggles, where various ways of interpreting and envisioning the world are confronting with one another. In relation to this, Howarth (2000:9) maintains that “[t]he construction of discourses thus involves the exercise of power and a consequent structuring of the relations between different social agents.”

This understanding of discourse disputes a positivistic way of considering knowledge as a pure reflection of reality. Discourse theorists are, rather, interested in how reality is constructed by discourse. Despite the existence of an object in the empirical world, the construction of its meaning is dependent upon discourse, and, thus, the epistemological process of it is inherently discursive. However, discourse is not internally homogeneous and coherent. It is, rather, composed of a broad range of dispersed concepts, statements, ideas, and practices that may not necessarily be grouped
together in a logical sense (Foucault 1976). Therefore, discursive formations are conditioned by external factors.

In this respect, discourse is a historical construction, that is, its formation and transformation take place in certain historical circumstances. Hence, rather than being a self-contained static system of meanings and relations, a discourse undergoes change reflecting the difference of historical circumstances. This is also a process of responding to challenges from different sets of meanings and relations. Challenges to a discursive system come not only from different discourses but also from within. The field of discourse is subject to contestations among various social and political groups. Reflecting power relations, discourses do not have the same discursive power. The interpretive systems of some discourses can be shared by a broader range of social groups than those of others. Furthermore, as critical discourse analysts note, power of certain discourses serves for the political purpose of domination at the expense of the marginalization of other discourses (Wodak 1989; Fairclough 2003).

Hegemony

A discourse can be in a hegemonic status when its assumptions are consented by a broad range of social groups and social relations. In this case, hegemonic discourse reflects the hegemony of certain social groups. In Gramscian notions, hegemony refers to dominant groups’ intellectual and moral leadership over subordinate groups, which is based upon a broad range of consent from the latter. Gramscian social ideas show a certain degree of departure from the mechanical historical materialism, which tends to
ignore the complex dynamics of the social, cultural, and political realms (superstructure) vis-à-vis the economic one (base). In this regard, Gramsci differentiates two major levels of the superstructure: civil society and political society, each of which is relevant to hegemony and domination respectively in terms of the relations of social forces. As Gramsci acknowledges, “These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of ‘hegemony’ which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of ‘direct domination’ or command exercised through the state and ‘juridical’ government” (Forgacs 1988:306). For Gramsci (1971:57), “domination” and “leadership” are two main ways in which the supremacy of a social group manifests itself, and the two forms of power relation mainly operate in different realms of the superstructure. In contrast to political society, in which domination is dependent upon coercive measures, civil society, “the ensemble of organisms commonly called ‘private’,” is a realm in which moral and intellectual leadership operates in power relations based upon the consent of the subordinate (Gramsci 1971:12).

For Gramsci, hegemony is distinguished from “direct domination” in the sense that it is preconditioned by the consent of subordinate groups. As Gramsci notes, social hegemony is based upon “[t]he ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group [. . .]” (Forgacs 1988:306-7). While acknowledging that consent and coercion are closely interrelated with each other, Gramsci emphasizes the voluntary aspect of the former that is manifested, in principle, in the cultural, moral, and ideological leadership. In this respect, the leadership legitimated by the consent from a wide range of social
groups is an important precondition for the dominant group’s construction of “historical bloc,” which refers to the association at a certain historical point between the “complex, contradictory and discordant ensemble of the superstructures” and “the ensemble of the social relations of production” (Forgacs 1988:192). In relation to this, Gramsci (1971:57-8) notes that “[a] social group can, and indeed must, already exercise ‘leadership’ before winning governmental power [. . .]; it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to ‘lead’ as well.”

Insofar as hegemony needs a broad range of consent, it should take on a certain degree of universal bearings. This aspect of hegemony is closely related to Gramsci’s emphasis on the need for a system of alliances among social groups as a precondition for it. In Gramscian terms, a social group cannot achieve hegemony if it remains sticking to its own economic-corporate interests. For a social group to be dominant, it needs to transcend its own economic interests to build political alliances with other groups. At the stage of the political alliance formation, as Gramsci notes, “one becomes aware that one’s own corporate interests [. . .] can and must become the interests of other subordinate groups” (Forgacs 1988:205). As such, Gramsci suggests a need for constructing an awareness of homogeneity in political terms among diverse social groups that have different economic interests, for the purpose of constructing hegemony.

This insight of Gramsci’s is particularly worthwhile to note in the sense that hegemony implies a political phase in which both dominant and subordinate groups develop shared interests. As such, the rule of the dominant group is regarded by
subordinate groups not necessarily as oppressive but, rather, as beneficial to their own interests. In the hegemonic phase, the rule of a certain group is politically allied with the subordination of other groups, and thus is defended by both of the dominant and subordinate groups. In cultural terms, this becomes a phase where the cultural activities of the dominant group take on universal bearings, which appear to transcend the particularism of any social group. At the national level, a hegemonic group tends to be regarded as representing rather broader “national interests” than those of any particular group or class. In the concept of Gramsci’s “national-popular,” it is implied that the intellectual activities of the dominant group are widely shared by the majority of the national population. In this way, hegemonic cultural and political activities are well associated with national energies. As for this, Simon (1991:44) argues that “[a] hegemonic class is one which succeeds in combining these patriotic struggles and ideas with its own class interests so as to achieve national leadership.” Thus, an important way of securing hegemony for a social group at the national level is to successfully relate its own political economic interests to “national interests,” leading to create “national-popular” collective energies.

Gramscian notion of hegemony has influenced many cultural theorists in a variety of ways. Discourse theorists, in particular, have tried to employ the concept of hegemony without prioritizing “fundamental” groups. A main criticism of the Gramscian notion of hegemony is its assumption of centralized power based upon class identities. Supposing the constructive, decentralized nature of identities, Laclau and Mouffe (2001:137-8) criticize Gramsci’s thought in two ways: “(a) his insistence that
hegemonic subjects are necessarily constituted on the plane of the fundamental classes; (b) his postulate that [...] every social formation structures itself around a single hegemonic centre.” Laclau and Mouffe argue that hegemony can appear in diverse sites of social relation. For them, hegemony emerges from “a field where the ‘elements’ have not crystallized into ‘moments’” (ibid.:134). As for a condition for the emergence of hegemony, they also argue that “hegemony should emerge in a field criss-crossed by antagonisms [...]” (ibid.:135). Thus, hegemonic relations appear from the denial of certain stable discursive relations that are regarded as the “structured totality resulting from articulatory practice” (ibid.:105). In this way, there is a distinction between “discursive formation” and “hegemonic formation”: that is, the former is relevant to the process of creating a system of regularities among “moments” while the latter refers to practices among antagonistic “elements.” Supposing that hegemony emerges from antagonism, Laclau and Mouffe (2001:153) argue that “our task is to identify the conditions in which a relation of subordination becomes a relation of oppression, and thereby constitutes itself into the site of an antagonism.” Thus, for them, hegemonic struggles involve recognizing antagonisms by denaturalizing the preexistent taken-for-granted positivities in various sites of social relation.

A main critic of Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory in regard to the concept of hegemony is Stuart Hall. Hall claims to dissociate himself from “the discourse theoretical approach to the analysis of whole social formations” and criticizes their

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As for a distinction between “element” and “moment,” Laclau and Mouffe (2001:105) note that: “[t]he differential positions, insofar as they appear articulated within a discourse, we will call moments. By contrast, we will call element any difference that is not discursively articulated.”
position for the “dissolution of everything into discourse” (cited in Wood 1998:404). While recognizing the plurality of the social, Hall still emphasizes the central role of the state, by arguing that many parts of civil society should be articulated with the state for the creation of hegemonic power. In this respect, for Hall, hegemonic struggles taking place in multiple sites of the social are not enough to be politically significant, but need to enable the passage of power into the state. For this, he emphasizes the practice of articulation, which links the “dispersed conditions of practice of different social groups” with “those forms of politics and ideology which allow them to become historically effective as collective social agents” (cited in Wood 1998:408).

I consider that those theoretical positions are not contradictory with one another, but have different emphases in explaining complex social phenomena. Thus, on the basis of Gramsci’s notion of hegemony, I take the point from Laclau and Mouffe that no identities are essential and that there can be far more diverse sites of hegemonic struggles. However, their decentralized theory has a weakness in its disregard of real politics, in which power is more concentrated in certain sites, rather than is equally distributed. Thus, power struggles in some sites can be more important than others. In this respect, I recognize the importance of the state as the currently most powerful political institution and, thus, as an important target for struggle. Based upon Gramsci’s notion, I also believe that some hegemonic blocs are more committed to the values of equity, diversity, and justice of society, than others.
Discourse, Orientalism, and Developmentalism

A number of studies have employed the Foucauldian notion of discourse as a historically specific knowledge system for their analyses. Among others, Said (1979) has used it for his analysis of the discourse of Orientalism. As noted above, Foucault maintains that discourse is a structural formation within which objects and subjects of knowledge are constructed in a certain way. In this sense, the elements of knowledge are meaningful only within the system of knowledge itself. Employing this concept of discourse to his analysis of Orientalism, Said argues that any knowledge of the Orient is not free from the systematic web of meanings and relations of Orientalism. As he notes, “the Orient is not an inert fact of nature. It is not merely there, just as the Occident itself is not just there either” (Said 1979:4; emphasis in the original). In this respect, the Orient is the very construction of Orientalism. As discourse requires a system of relations, the construction of the Orient is not possible without elements it is related to. In this regard, an important conceptual element is the Occident that is constructed in relation to the Orient within the systematic knowledge of Orientalism, reflecting the power relation between the two. In this way, both the Orient and the Occident are the historical constructions of Orientalism, which have affected the construction of reality for the interests of the latter. In this regard, Said (1979:5) mentions that “as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West.”

In development studies, post-development theorists provide insights into the understanding of the discourse of developmentalism, based upon the notion of discourse
in Foucauldian terms. For them, developmentalism is no more than a discursive system reflecting the Western ways of looking at the world, entailing an epistemic hierarchy between the West and the non-West. Escobar (1995:6), for instance, argues that “development” is “a historically produced discourse” or “a regime of representation.” In this sense, the central concepts of developmentalism such as the “developed,” the “underdeveloped, or “poverty” are in no ways the faithful representations of reality out there, but are the very constructions of the discursive system and thus meaningful only within the system. An important aspect of developmentalism is the construction of a hierarchy between the “developed” and the “underdeveloped,” which serves for the former’s management and domination of the latter. In this respect, the hierarchical structure of developmentalism is somewhat similar to that of Orientalism. Thus, Escobar (1995:6) acknowledges that “[t]he study of development as discourse is akin to Said’s study of the discourses on the Orient.”

*Developmentalism and Global Power Relations*

In a global historical perspective, I pay attention to the global discursive circumstances that fostered the formation and transformation of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk. In this regard, developmentalism is a noticeable discourse that has determined power relations around the globe in the postwar era. “Development” is not a unitary concept, but is defined in plural ways. Nederveen Pieterse (2001:3), for instance, defines it as “the organized intervention in collective affairs according to a standard of improvement.” By adding that “[w]hat constitutes improvement and what is appropriate intervention
obviously vary according to class, culture, historical context and relations of power,” he
opens a room for the plurality of the concept of development. When it comes to
“developmentalism,” however, the concept of development strongly takes on singularity,
by prioritizing the value of economic development or economic growth over various
important values of society, such as harmony, equity, solidarity, etc. The degree of
development in developmentalism tends to be measured in simple quantitative indices
such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita.

Given the cultural and institutional power of developmental alliances around the
world, developmentalism has enjoyed a hegemonic status at the global level. Under its
hegemony, the opportunities for thinking about development in diverse ways have been
far reduced. The significance of developmentalism lies in its power to construct social
reality. As Laclau and Mouffe (2001:110) notes, discourse is “a real force which
contributes to the moulding and constitution of social relations.” In this regard,
Fairclough (2003:130) mentions that it is through “systems of classification” or
“preconstructed and taken for granted ‘di-visions’” that “people continuously generate
‘visions’ of the world.” As for the discursive power of developmentalism, Escobar
(1995:41) argues that it sets “the rules of the game: who can speak, from what points of
view, with what authority, and according to what criteria of experience.” In this way, it
creates representations, institutionalizes social practices, designates identities, and
transforms social reality according to its interpretations, imaginations, and
classifications of the world.
Given the historicity of discourse, developmentalism in the global context can be understood mainly as a postwar construction, which reflects the transitions of global power relations and global political economic, cultural circumstances. With regard to this, four circumstantial changes are notable. First, in cultural aspects, the discourse of civilization, which supported a hierarchical relationship between the “civilized” and the “uncivilized” in the colonial era, lost its discursive hegemony in the wake of the imperial wars committed by the so-called “civilized” countries. This situation entailed that the power relations among different societies could no longer be defined by the hierarchical framework of the “civilized” and the “uncivilized.” Second, there was a hegemonic transition from Europe to the U.S. in terms of world political economy and a need for new discursive frameworks reflecting this change arose. Third, former colonized societies and countries retrieved independence and achieved sovereignty whose national statuses were legitimately equal to those of former colonial countries. And last, the onset of the Cold War strengthened the usefulness of developmentalism as an ideological tool for mobilization at national and international levels.

The popularity of developmentalism reflects a hegemonic discursive change from the discourse of civilization centered on European power to that of development under American hegemony. With regard to this, Patterson (1997:49) states that “[a]fter 1945, the United States, using arguments that echoed those of social Darwinists half a century earlier, began to project itself as the center and driving force of Western civilization.” With this as a momentum, he adds, “progress was measured in terms of economic growth [. . .]” (ibid.:50). The discursive change was a sea change of
perceptual frameworks, which accompanied the appearance of new concepts, identities, and relations. In this respect, the transition was a point when former “savage” or “primitive” worlds began to be termed and identified as the “underdeveloped,” and the “civilized” world as the “developed.” An important concept characterizing the “underdeveloped” area is poverty. In this context, Escobar (1995:22) points out that “poverty on a global scale was a discovery of the post-World War II period.”

In terms of global power relations, the hegemonic discursive transition enabled former colonial countries to maintain their cultural hegemony as they were represented as “developed” countries over the “developing” or “underdeveloped.” The discourse of development can be regarded as a more advanced form of hegemonic discourse as it supposes a cooperative relationship between the subjects in the hierarchical discursive framework. That is to say, compared with colonial subjectivities, which are basically grounded upon an antagonism between the colonizer and the colonized, the identities provided by the discourse of development do not necessarily assume the domination-subordination relationship. Rather, the relationship between the “developed” and the “developing” in the discourse of development is usually conceived of as a reciprocal one.

An important epistemic ground of developmentalism is its Eurocentric idea of progress. In the colonial era, European colonialists perceived as “savage” or “primitive” other societies that supposedly had different societal forms from their own ones. Assuming a universal timeline for human progress, they supposed those different societies as the past of Europe, somewhat equivalent to the medieval forms of European
societies. By turning the “spatial difference” into the “temporal hierarchy,” they justified their colonial projects as “civilizing mission.” Combined with evolutionary ideas, the modern idea of progress took on strong metaphoric bearings by illusively comparing social changes to the development of living things (Nisbet 1969). The discourse of development is also grounded upon this epistemology in assuming a universal linear path of progress from the “underdeveloped,” “developing,” to the “developed.” As certain countries are termed as a temporarily advanced form, they are presented as the future societal form of the others, incurring a cultural hierarchy between them. In this framework, it is naturally assumed that “developing” societies should “catch-up” with the “developed” through their internal transformation of socio-cultural systems (Rostow 1960; Parsons 1971; Inkeles and Smith 1974). Here, “developed” societies are presented as a universal model of development.

Nederveen Pieterse (2001/2009) provides important insights into the interaction between global power relations and development. Employing a discursive approach to developmentalism, he pays attention to the transition of global hegemonic discourses from evolutionism, modernization theory, to development theory, reflecting the change of global power relations. On the basis of the interconnectivity between knowledge and power, he argues that “[e]volutionism was an imperial vision, modernization theory bears witness to the American century, and development theory translates into contemporary relations of power” (Nederveen Pieterse 2001:18). As such, each

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developmental idea prevalent in a certain period corresponds to certain power relations characteristic of that period. Far from objective knowledge, developmentalism contains the willingness of the West to change the world according to its imaginations. This incurs certain power relations surrounding the knowledge of development. As for this, Nederveen Pieterse (2001:18) states that “[t]hose who declare themselves furthest advanced along its course claim privileged knowledge of the direction of change.” In this respect, developmentalism is the claim to truth by the centre of power.

**Developmentalism and Eurocentrism**

A central idea deeply underlying various developmental thoughts of the West is evolutionism, by which it posits itself at the top of the evolutionary hierarchy. As the West sets itself as the most evolved or developed, the remaining part of the world is identified as non-developed. In evolutionism, the complexity of the world tends to be simplified into certain categories posited in different stages, such as: “primitivism, savagery, barbarism, civilization” (Nederveen Pieterse 2001:19). This kind of stage theory transforms spatial differences into a temporal hierarchy. When the world is classified into some evolutionary stages, Nederveen Pieterse (2001:19) notes, “global space appeared transformed into a time sequence, with Europeans as the only contemporaries, the sole inhabitants of modernity” (emphasis in the original).

In observing the historical transition of development ideas, Nederveen Pieterse pays attention to a rupture between the pre- and post- world war periods. As the wars seriously undermined the faith in progress, the pre-existing ideas of evolutionism and
progress supporting European hegemony fell into crisis. In this context, a different type of evolutionism, i.e., modernization theory, appeared reflecting the change of global power relations in the postwar era with the rise of American hegemony. Modernization theory brought about U.S.-centered notion of modernity, in which the U.S. was the “epitome of modernity” with the majority of the world in the status of “tradition” or “unmodern.”

However, with the decline of American hegemony and, more generally, Western hegemony, many modern thoughts including modernization theory lost their appeal. In this context, Nederveen Pieterse argues that the keyword in general discourses became “development,” instead of “modernization.” In this transition of keyword, yet, linear, teleological evolutionism still remained. As he notes, “The categories used in the UN system of highly developed, developed, less developed and least developed countries structurally resemble the stages of evolutionism [. . .]” (ibid.:24).

For Nederveen Pieterse, developmentalism is now in crisis, which is accompanied by the crisis of Eurocentric political economic, cultural orders. Not only the promises of developmentalism failed in the global South, but also various societies in the global North exposed their own limitations in various ways. Western societies have exposed a lot of problems, such as growing economic inequality, environmental unsustainability, individualization, etc. Meanwhile, some non-Western developmental models are often supposed as more sustainable, whose modernization processes did not follow the predicted path of modernization theory. As Eurocentric developmentalism

\[\text{\textsuperscript{5}}\text{ In this study, I do not distinguish the transition from “modernization” to “development,” but regard the former as part of the latter.}\]
did not bring about rosy futures in the global South, there have been a lot of resistances to it. According to Nederveen Pieterse (2001), the crisis of developmentalism reflects the crisis of deeper perceptual frameworks, such as Western ethnocentrism and epistemology.

In those respects, developmentalism is closely associated with Eurocentrism (Hettne 1995; Cowen and Shenton 1996; Leys 1996; Rist 1997; Mehmet 1999). Eurocentrism is understood as an attitude to regard European experiences of history as the archetype of global history. Wallerstein (2004a:93) defines it as “any assumption that the patterns discerned by analyzing pan-European history and social structure are universal patterns, and therefore implicitly a model for persons in other parts of the world.” It can be analytically divided into two interrelated epistemic attitudes: European exceptionalism and Orientalism, of which the former is relevant to the construction of the superior self while the latter is to that of the inferior other (Kang 2004).

A notable characteristic of Eurocentrism is an imagined hierarchy between the West and the non-West. In Eurocentric discourses, virtually heterogeneous “others” tend to be constructed as a homogeneous entity with which negative attributes are associated, such as “irrational,” “depraved,” “childlike,” and “abnormal,” whereas similarly heterogeneous entities are homogenized into the “self” to which positive traits such as “rational,” “virtuous,” “mature,” and “normal” are attributed (Said 1979). As for the misleadingly simplistic distinction between the two worlds, Hobsbawm (1987:16) points out that “the (much larger) second world was united by nothing except its relations with [. . .] the first.” In this regard, he appropriately questions, “What else,
except a common membership of the human race, had the Chinese Empire in common with Senegal, Brazil with the New Hebrides, Morocco with Nicaragua?” (Hobsbawm 1987:16) Nevertheless, this kind of episteme has historically provided a solid ground for colonialism and imperialism. As Hobsbawm (1975:267) questions, “what was easier than to assume that those who represented the style of childhood or adolescence in the development of civilization [. . .] had to be treated like children by their mature ‘parents’?” As such, societies of the West and the non-West in Eurocentric discourses are hierarchically ordered, reflecting global power relations. In this regard, Hall (1996:186) points out that the “West,” as a set of images, provides the “criteria of evaluation against which other societies are ranked and around which powerful positive and negative feelings cluster.” This makes a fertile ground for global governmentality led by the West (Larner and Walters 2004).6

While the Eurocentric hierarchy between the West and the non-West was explicit in the discourse of civilization in the past, e.g., between the civilizer and the civilized, it is implicit in basic concepts of developmental discourses in the contemporary era. As certain societal forms supposedly prevalent in the West are

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6 Global governmentality is a concept mainly developed by theorists who try to apply Foucauldian notion of governmentality to the global order. Foucault (2000:345) says that “power relations are rooted in the whole network of the social.” Thus, power is somewhat invisible and dispersed, and hidden in signs and meanings. For governmentality, Foucault pays attention to the production and exchange of meanings, rather than to the direct exercise of power by political institutions. His interest lies in the situation in which individuals voluntarily discipline themselves according to certain ideas and knowledge. In this way, governmentality is embedded in the social. Applied to the global order, governmentality refers to power dispersed in the relations among countries, exercised mainly through signs and meanings. In this regard, Larner and Walters (2004:7) note that “the inter-state system is itself an art of governmentality.” Global governmentality is concerned with disciplining countries and societies through the production and exchange of signs and meanings at the global level. In the trend of globalization, neoliberalism was a useful tool for global governmentality as it provided a set of standards to which individuals and nations-states should discipline themselves to be included in the global network.
designated as the “developed,” they tend to be regarded as the desirable future of the “developing,” regardless of the historical and cultural variations of those societies. Therefore, to unilaterally designate certain societies as “developing” deprives them of their own identities (Sachs 1992; Brohman 1995; Escobar 1995; Rahnema and Bawtree 1997; Nederveen Pieterse 2001). In this representational framework, various forms of life and knowledge, which are not considered as belonging to the “developed,” are marginalized (Apffel-Marglin and Marglin 1990, 1996). This is a good ground for justifying the domination-subordination relationship between the “developed” and “developing.” In this regard, Tucker (1999:1) points out that developmental discourse is “an essential part of the process whereby the ‘developed’ countries manage, control and even create the Third World [. . .].” In this understanding of developmental discourse, development virtually becomes “the process whereby other peoples are dominated and their destinies are shaped according to an essentially Western way of conceiving and perceiving the world” (ibid.). Despite the relative decline of Western power, Eurocentric discourses are still consciously or unconsciously accepted around the globe (Alatas 2006). In this respect, Eurocentrism is distinguished from other provincial ethnocentrisms and marginalized belief systems such as racism, which are criticized by mainstream discourses (Amin 1989; Blaut 1993; Shohat and Stam 1994).

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7 These conditions facilitate the need for critical researches that are “localized, grounded in the specific meanings, traditions, customs, and community relations” (Denzin 2005:935-6).
Modernities

During the colonial era, numerous non-Western societies unexpectedly encountered with the threatening expansion of the West. A paradox entailed by this situation was that they had to embark on modernization projects mirroring the image of the West in order to resist it. Motivated by “a sudden external threat” (Therborn 1995), they launched various modernization projects to transform themselves into “modern” societies that could effectively confront the West. In these processes, their political, economic, social, and cultural values came to resemble those of the West to a certain extent, inducing a dilemma for them between modernization and Westernization (Zheng 1999). Many non-Western societies accepted the West as the most significant other in their modernization processes that were deeply associated with their modern identity formations. This was a process of their incorporation into the representational schemes set by the West, which then functioned as a yardstick of their processes of modernization.

This does not mean, yet, that those non-Western societies involved in modernization processes have converged into modern images envisioned by the West. Rather, the processes of modernization are as diverse as are the variation of the societies’ historical and cultural backgrounds. Despite the fact that the West has been the most significant other, the non-Western societies have, in reality, transformed themselves into modern societies reflecting their own historical conditions, which are
distinguishable from those of the West. The Japanese modernization process, for instance, has brought about a societal form that has been interpreted as non-modern or postmodern by many theorists (McCormack and Sugimoto 1988; Miyoshi and Harootunian 1989; Clammer 1995, 2001). The modern world has been not only far more diverse and heterogeneous but also more connected and interactive across time and space than is assumed by the Eurocentric notion of modernity (Nederveen Pieterse 1995).

The Eurocentric notion of modernity basically exists in a singular form on the grounds of two basic assumptions. First, it is originated from “modern Europe,” which is often imagined as a historical and spatial exception disconnected from the rest of human histories and societies. And second, it is also assumed as the advanced type of societal characteristics that other societies are to eventually emulate. On these assumptions, the goal and path to modernity are assumed singular, of which European societies are the reference. In this way, the European particularistic view assumes an air of universalism (Wallerstein 2006), and this kind of perception of modernity prevailed in major thoughts on social change, such as American modernization theory (Rostow 1960; Parsons 1971; Inkeles and Smith 1974).

Close observation of reality, however, disproves this notion of modernity. Not only are the paths of modernization within the West different, but are those among non-Western societies diverse. Quite contrary to the belief in the convergence to the European imagination of modernity, the processes of modernization and the forms of

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8 The West itself, indeed, is not a homogeneous entity.
modernity exist in the plural in the empirical world. Furthermore, the plural forms of modernity are not present by themselves confined within geographical boundaries. They are, rather, understood as the results of historical interactions and hybridization occurring across geographical boundaries (Nederveen Pieterse 1995). In those respects, it is appropriate to employ the notion of “modernities,” giving a room of plurality to “modernity.” In the concept of “modernities,” various temporal and spatial phenomena are conceived of as entangled with one another, and certain phenomena regarded as “modern” appear differently from society to society as well as from period to period. For instance, the appearance and development of the modernity of modern European cities should not be understood as the result of the processes enclosed within them, but as connected to the past as well as other regions, such as the medieval forms of cities in various regions (Alsayyad and Roy 2006). The notion of modernities does not disregard an important point that various types of modernities are not only different from one another in general characteristics, but also are the results of historical interactions with one another (Göle 2000; Kamali 2005; Bonnet 2006).

Eurocentrism in Korea and the Discourse of Sŏnjin’guk

Those global historical circumstances are closely related to the formations and transformations of Koreans’ Eurocentric worldviews. Incorporated into the Eurocentric world order, Koreans have generally represented their national self and the world within the framework of Eurocentric discourses throughout modernization processes in changing global and national circumstances. In their early interaction with the West,
they employed the discourses of *kaehwa* (enlightenment) and *munmyŏng* (civilization), reflecting the European colonialist discourse of civilization in the colonial era. Then, since the mid-twentieth century, they have constructed the discourse of *sŏnjin’guk* (advanced country) echoing the global discourse of development in the post-colonial period. From a historical perspective, the period when the discourse of *sŏnjin’guk* arose dominant witnessed the ascent of U.S. hegemony (Wallerstein 2000, 2004b) and South Korea’s launch of aggressive modernization projects under the strong developmental state (Amsden 1989; Wade 1990; Yoon 2005). In this respect, while modernization theory “bears witness to American century” (Nederveen Pieterse 2001:18), the discourse of *sŏnjin’guk* observes the era of South Korean developmental regime.

The discourse of *sŏnjin’guk* is deeply related to how South Koreans represent the world, identify their country, transform their society, and imagine their future in the contemporary context. It is a historically constructed knowledge system based upon the relations constructed around the concepts of *sŏnjin’guk* (advanced country) and *hujin’guk* (backward country). Promulgated mainly by developmentalist ruling groups, it has provided legitimacy to South Korean developmental regime. The discourse of *sŏnjin’guk* is so prevailing today that a main national vision of the contemporary Lee Myung-Bak administration is to achieve ‘*sŏnjin-illyu-kukka*’ (advanced first-class country), a terminological variant of *sŏnjin’guk*. In relation to this, the term “*sŏnjinhwa*” (achieving advancement) is widely used by governmental organizations and various opinion leaders.
One of its most notable characteristics is a hierarchical distinction between sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk, in which the former has the latter as its alienated other. For South Koreans, in general, sŏnjin’guk is positively represented as a country that they should learn from and eventually catch up with, while hujin’guk is considered as a country lagging behind. As for the distinction, Lim (1994:227-8) states that:

South Koreans’ third framework of perceiving foreign countries is that of distinguishing sŏnjin’guk from hujin’guk. In this epistemic structure, which can be said as a structure of perceiving foreign countries based on a kind of evolutionary developmentalism (or linear modernization theory), South Koreans categorize various countries in the world into sŏnjin’guk or hujin’guk, and tend to dichotomize between the “countries to learn” for South Korea as a hujin’guk in the past to develop itself, and the countries that are not [...].

As an idealized concept into which South Koreans’ various positive values are projected, the concept of sŏnjin’guk plays diverse roles in the contemporary Korean society in varied contexts. In terms of national identity, the discourse of sŏnjin’guk frequently identifies Korea as “near sŏnjin’guk” or “sŏnjin’guk munt’ŏk” (on the threshold of sŏnjin’guk). It interprets South Korea’s economic development as an escape from the status of hujin’guk, and assumes hujin’guk as the past of the country and sŏnjin’guk as its future. It tends to argue that South Korea has gone through the mobility from hujin’guk to the contemporary status of “near sŏnjin’guk” by virtue of the past generations’ hard efforts, and put a responsibility on the contemporary generations to achieve a full-fledged sŏnjin’guk status in the near future. In this way, the discourse has been playing an important role in directing the change of Korean society.
The formation of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk reflected the rise of developmental regime in Korea, which also echoed the global transition of hegemonic discourse and power relations. Seizing power through a military coup in 1961, the Park Chung-Hee regime institutionalized various ideas and practices in its aggressive pursuit of economic development. Lacking procedural legitimacy in taking power, the Park regime sought for it from two main discursive sources: anti-communism and developmentalism (Kim and Cho 2003; Cho 2003).9 Under the slogan of “choguk kūndaehwa” (the modernization of fatherland), the regime justified its pursuit of rapid economic growth, and this was generally consented by civil society which internalized the logic of development. In this regard, Cho (2003) points out that the 1960s was the period when the general public consented the prioritization of economic growth over democracy, as was reflected in such phrases as “minjujuŭi-ga pammŏgyŏjunya” (does democracy feed us?).

The transition of global hegemonic discourse and the rise of the South Korean developmental regime incurred a discursive transformation from the discourse of munmyŏng (civilization) to that of sŏnjin’guk in terms of South Korea’s dominant national self and worldviews (Table 1). Amidst the crisis of the global discourse of civilization, the West came to lose its authority within the framework of the discourse of munmyŏng through the two imperial wars. Unlike at the turn of the century when a clear hierarchy was found between the West and the non-West including Korea in the

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9 As Cho (2003) notes, the 1960s was a period when developmentalism first appeared as a notable dominant discourse to be combined with the preexisting primary dominant discourse of anti-communism. In regard to material conditions, Seo (1991) argues that the 1960s was the period of the full-scale appearance of South Korean capitalist classes, based upon the export-oriented industrialization strategy.
munmyŏng discourse, the period after World War I showed no apparent epistemic hierarchy between Korea and the West as the former was also regarded as a kind of munmyŏng-guk (civilized country) of chŏngsin munmyŏng (spiritual civilization). The West was rather represented as having advanced material civilization but weak at spiritual aspects. In this respect, both Korea and the West were conceived of as the possessors of civilizations of different kind and, thus, their statuses were not necessarily in a hierarchical order.

Table 1. A Conceptual Overview of the Transformations of Korean and Global Eurocentric Discourses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Colonial Era (the 1880s – 1940s)</th>
<th>Post-Colonial Era (the 1950s to the present)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Global (Hegemonic) Discourse</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Main Concept</td>
<td>Civilization</td>
<td>Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiation</td>
<td>Civilized / Uncivilized</td>
<td>Developed / Underdeveloped (Developing)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hegemony</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>The U.S.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Korean Discourse</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Main Concept</td>
<td>Kaehwa, Munmyŏng</td>
<td>Sŏnjin’guk</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Kaehwa-guk / Mi-kaehwa-guk;</td>
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<td>Munmyŏng-guk / Yaman-guk</td>
<td>Sŏnjin’guk / Hujin’guk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Differentiation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hegemony</td>
<td>Reformists (Early modernists)</td>
<td>Developmentalists</td>
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<tr>
<td>Representation of the West</td>
<td>Kaehwa-guk, Munmyŏng-guk</td>
<td>Sŏnjin’guk</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Munmyŏng-guk → Pan-kaehwa-guk →</td>
<td>Hujin’guk → Chungjin’guk → NICS →</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Munmyŏng-guk</td>
<td>Sŏnjin’guk munt’ŏk</td>
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31
This changed with the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, and the hierarchy reappeared in a quite similar form to that of the discourse of munmyŏng of the early modern period, yet, with different contents. It is interesting to note that Korea’s identity dramatically degraded from munmyŏng-guk in the discourse of munmyŏng to hujin’guk in the discourse of sŏnjin’guk. With the identity of hujin’guk, Korea felt a sense of humiliation vis-à-vis sŏnjin’guk or the West, and, in this context, the Korean developmental regime’s aggressive pursuit of modernization was justified. The modernization project was understood in the context of urgency to transform the nation from the status of hujin’guk to that of sŏnjin’guk. Having gone through the identities of hujin’guk and chungjin’guk (developing country), South Korea now aims for a full-fledged sŏnjin’guk. As such, the discourse of sŏnjin’guk has provided a primary interpretive framework for those historical changes of national identity, goal, and vision. In those respects, various sociological ideas interplay in the discourse of sŏnjin’guk in the Korean context, such as developmentalism, Eurocentrism, and nationalism.

As noted above, developmentalism is one of the most influential hegemonic discourses presenting national identities and visions around the globe in the postwar period. Thus, many countries in the South defined themselves as “underdeveloped” or “developing” country in the developmental discursive framework, and launched various national projects to achieve a “developed” status. In developmentalism, those countries’ pursuits of economic growth and industrialization were justified as a historical necessity. Turkey and Egypt in the 1950s, for instance, “embarked upon grand developmentalist projects” of different kinds: that is, the former was based upon “popular capitalism” and
the latter upon “popular socialism” (Keyder and Oncu 1994:1). As such, both ideologies of capitalism and socialism were, in many ways, under the same regime of developmentalism in the Cold War context. In this regard, Turkish elites promoted the creation of “a new country, a new society, a new state . . . respected at home and abroad” (Eralp 1994:206).

In no other countries were the aspirations for national development clearer and more successful than in Asian developmental states in the 1970s. In the so-called Newly Industrializing Countries (NICs), such as South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, economic development was set as an urgent national goal. For this, each state effectively orchestrated national resources for the achievement of the goal in cooperative international circumstances. Those Asian countries recognized their “less developed” status and made hard efforts to achieve a “developed” status. In this way, their national identities and visions were constructed in terms of economic development.

National developmentalists solidified their hegemony through the endeavors to achieve the national goal of economic development. In this way, economic development as national goal was not just about economic concerns but also related to political situations. The national goal of economic development provided developmentalists with their political legitimacy. In this regard, Castells (1992:56) notes that “[a] state is developmental when it establishes as its principle of legitimacy its ability to promote and sustain development [. . .].” Thus, economic development is not just a goal but a means for the developmental state (Castells 1992:57). This relationship between economic development and political legitimacy is well shown in the South Korean
developmental state under the Park Chung-Hee regime in the 1960s and 70s. Taking power through a military coup, the Park regime sought for its political legitimacy mainly from economic development. In this regard, Koo and Kim (1992:133) note that the Park regime’s industrialization drive was “clearly a politically motivated plan to diffuse popular discontent and to mobilize people’s energy for a new economic goal.” They add that “[t]his was justified in the name of building a prosperous nation that would be able to join the club of advanced industrial countries [sŏnjin’guk]” (ibid.).

The aspirations for economic development are still strong in various countries today in different historical circumstances. For instance, Malaysia has set the Vision 2020 in 1991, in which it aims to become “a fully developed country by the year 2020” (Mahathir 2010). In this regard, current Prime Minister Najib Razak insists that “Malaysia needs to grow 8 percent annually over the next decade to achieve its goal of becoming a developed nation by 2020” (Pakiam and Adam 2009). Taiwan also aims for a “developed” status. For this, it has set a goal of achieving average 5-6 percent of annual GDP growth until 2012 (Taiwanese Department of Investment Services 2010). In this regard, a Taiwanese governmental vision mentions that the country should be “compatible with developed countries in terms of its economic development, social justice and environmental protection” (ibid.). In those respects, the aspiration for economic development and for “developed” national status is not specific to South Korea.

However, the context in which each country pursues its “developed” status varies from country to country. That is to say, the “developed” status does not mean the
same thing to countries, but reflects each one’s own identities and visions. In this sense, the concept of “developed” status is a construction of each country’s own historical experiences. For instance, the Malaysian aspiration for “developed” country, reflected in Vision 2020, is far different from South Korean one shown in the discourse of sŏnjin’guk. A notable difference is that the former shows a certain degree of resistance to the Eurocentric notions of development whereas the latter is rarely critical of them. In this regard, Malaysians set a different path of development from those of Western countries. In the Vision 2020, former Prime Minister Mohammad Mahathir insists that:

What, you might rightly ask, is “a fully developed country”? Do we want to be like any particular country of the present 19 countries that are generally regarded as “developed countries”? Do we want to be like the United Kingdom, like Canada, like Holland, like Sweden, like Finland, like Japan? To be sure, each of the 19, out of a world community of more than 160 states, has its strengths. But each also has its fair share of weaknesses. Without being a duplicate of any of them we can still be developed. We should be a developed country in our own mould. (Mahathir 2010)

As such, Malaysian concept of “developed” country shows an apparent departure from a Eurocentric attitude that tends to consider Western countries as actual models of “developed” country. Furthermore, Malaysian pursuit of “developed” status is far more comprehensive than is assumed by economic growth-centered developmentalism. In this regard, the Vision’s nine strategic challenges indicate that the competitive, dynamic, and robust economy is just one strategic condition for the national vision.

The Taiwanese strategy for economic development is also distinguished from South Korean one in terms of prominent national identity. Despite its importance in national strategy, economic development is not dominant enough to define national
identity for the Taiwanese. In this regard, the most important factor affecting dominant national identity varies from country to county as well as from period to period. Some countries, for instance, focus on economic factor in their construction of national identities, while others emphasize political or cultural aspects. Currently, the Taiwanese seem to be more concerned with the political factor for their national identity, e.g., their relationship with mainland China (Corcuff 2002; Bedford and Hwang 2006). Having successfully achieved industrialization and democratization, the Taiwanese are now struggling with the crisis of national identity in terms of international politics. As Liao (2002:286) notes, “Although Taiwan has [. . .] succeeded in surmounting the first two challenges, poverty and political charge, the third and the greatest challenge – that of stabilizing relations with mainland China – is an obstacle yet to be overcome.” In this sense, for the Taiwanese, the prominent issue of national identity is more of an international political problem rather than of an economic one. This is distinguished from South Koreans’ situation, in which the economic issue is still the most dominant factor in defining their national identity after having achieved industrialization and democratization.

In those respects, the case of South Korea is unique in their national identity construction with the discourse of sŏnjin’guk. Despite the common pursuit of “developed” status among various countries in the global developmental era, South Korean aspiration for “sŏnjin’guk” takes on strong Eurocentric bearings and plays a dominant role in the construction of national identity. In this respect, the South Korean discourse of sŏnjin’guk shows one of the best examples of nationally popular discourse,
which contains main elements of Eurocentrism, developmentalism, and nationalism. Besides, South Korea makes an interesting case in the sense that it is a former colonized country, which now demonstrates, probably, the strongest aspiration for being included at the center of the Eurocentric global stage.

**Research Goal and Question**

Despite its significance, the discourse of sŏnjin‘guk has not been a primary focus of research so far. Previous studies on Korean dominant discourses tended to focus on governmental slogans and policies. In this regard, some suggest a historical transformation of dominant discourses in South Korea according to the change of governmental discursive foci: from anti-communism (the 1950s); modernization, industrialization, and development (the 1960s - 80s); to segyehwa (the 1990s) (Cho 2003; Kim and Cho 2003). Cho’s (2003) study offers a succinct overview on the historical transformations of South Korean dominant discourses in relation to different political and social circumstances. He categorizes modern South Korean history into three main periods in terms of the change of dominant discourses: the 1950s; the authoritarian period of 1961-1987; and the period of democratization after 1987. He argues that a discourse that characterized the 1950s was that of “pangong” (anti-communism). Based upon this, he conceptualizes the society in this period as “pangong kyuuyul sahoe” (anticommunist regimented society). In this period, South Korea’s economy relied much on aids from outside and its willingness for economic development was somewhat weak. This situation underwent a sea change when a
military group seized power through a coup d’etat in 1961. In this period, the Park Chung-Hee regime made a priority of economic development, and promoted such slogans as “chal sal-a pose” (let’s live rich). In this situation, the discourse of “kûndaehwa” (modernization) took a dominant discursive position, which continued until the late 1980s. During the Park regime, the goal of economic development was set as a national mission under such a patriotic phrase as “choguk kûndaehwa” (the modernization of fatherland). In the 1990s, the discourse of “segyehwa” (globalization) took a dominant position, reflecting the global trend of neoliberal globalization, and domestic political economic circumstance changes. The authoritarian developmental regime of the past was transformed into a neo-developmental regime, which employed

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10 Neoliberalism is an economic philosophy, which has exerted a strong influence around the globe since the early 1980s until recent years. Its main idea lies in the prioritization of market freedom over state intervention. As for the role of the state, Milton Friedman argues that “[t]he scope of government must be limited . . . to preserve law and order, to enforce private contracts, to foster competitive markets . . .” (cited in Hettne 1995:113). Promoted by Thatcher’s Britain and Reagan’s U.S., neoliberalism began to earn global significance in the 1980s. Neoliberal principles were employed by international economic institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, for their structural adjustment programs, and were used as a discursive force, along with the discourse of globalization, driving the transformation of various countries. Its policies were well summarized in the Washington Consensus, which was made by the representatives of the G-7 countries and international institutions in 1989. A set of neoliberal policies recommended by it include: financial and trade liberalization; privatization of public enterprise; deregulation of measures restricting competition; strengthening of property rights; and so forth (Peet 1999). Because of its pro-market, pro-capital stance and neglect of human needs, a variety of criticisms have been made for it, and its discursive power seems to be far waned these days. Among others, Chang (2008) succinctly argues that neoliberalism has failed in all fronts of economic values: growth, equality, and stability.

In the case of South Korea, neoliberalism has been adopted as a leading economic philosophy by the ruling elites since the mid-1990s. On the assumption of limitless international competition promoted by neoliberal globalization, the ruling elites suggested neoliberal reformation as the only way to overcome the global challenge, as was reflected in such a slogan as segyehwa (globalization). Amidst the economic crisis in the late 1990s, in particular, South Korea as a debtor country had to undergo drastic neoliberal socio-economic transformations under the guidance of international institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund. Neoliberal ideas, which are represented by liberalization and privatization, are still influential in Korea today as a main strategy for winning global competition and eventually achieving sŏnjin’guk. In regard to the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, contemporary South Korean ruling elites widely promote the need for meeting the “global standard” to reach the goal of sŏnjin’guk. In this sense, South Korea seems to be one of the hardest working countries to follow the techniques of global governmentality.
neoliberalism as a main developmental strategy (Cho 2003). In this respect, Cho considers the discourse of *segye*hw*a* as that of neo-modernization or neo-developmentalism. Cho’s work provides an important contribution to the study of dominant discourses in modern Korean history. However, his focus remains on notable slogans and policies promoted by the government, and is not put on common epistemic discursive frameworks upon which those dominant developmental discourses are grounded. In this regard, I consider that the discourse of *sŏnjin’guk* has provided an important interpretive background for those dominant discourses especially after the appearance of the developmental regime.

In terms of Koreans’ construction of national identities vis-à-vis the West, there have been researches focusing on the discourses of *kaehwa* (enlightenment) and *munmyŏng* (civilization), which were prevalent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Previous studies have examined the dichotomous classification of *munmyŏng* and *yaman* (barbarism) in the Korean context (Y. Chung 2004; S. Chung 2004; J. Kim 2005). They have critically investigated Eurocentric assumptions embedded in those concepts and classifications, which were associated with Koreans’ Orientalistic constructions of the self and the world. However, researchers rarely examined Koreans’ national identity construction in relation to the West in the post-colonial context. From the mid-1990s, researchers have critically examined Eurocentrism from various perspectives in the Korean context, but rarely paid attention to the Eurocentricity of the ideas constructed around the binary distinction between
This study aims to examine the basic assumptions and characteristics of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, as well as the historical contexts of its formation and transformation. In particular, it analyzes various aspects of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, such as: its central concepts, classificatory frameworks, contexts of use, and identity constructions; historical conditions of its formation and transformation; contestations over and challenges to it; and its comparison with other East Asian countries’ national identity discourses. Main research questions are:

- What are main concepts, assumptions, representations, and relations that constitute the discourse?
- What are historical conditions on which the discourse appeared and developed?
- What are the variations of the main concepts, assumptions, and characteristics of the discourse across time, and how do they reflect historical circumstances?
- What are continuities and discontinuities in the historical transitions of discourses from kaehwa, munmyŏng to sŏnjin’guk?
- How does the discourse construct South Koreans’ national identities in relation to their perceptions of the West?
- How is the discourse challenged and contested by various social groups?
- How are the basic assumptions and characteristics of the discourse different from or similar to other East Asian countries’ dominant discourses in terms of their national self and worldview?

For this study, I try to employ various useful theoretical frameworks broadly from the areas of global, cultural, and development studies, rather than following a single theoretical tradition. This is mainly based upon my belief that no single theory is
perfect in explaining the complexity and diversity of human society. Rather, I observe many social phenomena, which can be better explained by the combination of various theories. Furthermore, I am wary of a possibility that sticking to a single theoretical framework is susceptible to doctrinism, as is shown, for instance, by orthodox Marxists or neoliberal fundamentalists. In practical terms, I advocate broad cooperation, rather than division, among various theoretical strands, which are critical of unjust social, cultural, and political economic systems and processes.

Upon these grounds, I use various ideas that are critical of Eurocentric conceptions of modernity and development. As noted above, I consider that the discourse of sŏnjin 'guk is a historically constructed system of knowledge reflecting the changes of power relations in Korea as well as the world. For this, I rely on Foucault’s critical understandings of modern systems of knowledge and discourse as reflections of power relations, which have no internal logical inevitability within themselves. In relation to this, I also borrow from post-developmentalists’ insights into their application of Foucault’s ideas to the understanding of developmentalism as a global discourse reflecting Eurocentric global power relations.

A weakness of Foucault’s idea on knowledge and power is that he does not pay much attention to the fact that certain knowledge systems serve for certain people’s political economic interests and their dominations over others. In this respect, I observe that power is not only dispersed, as is argued by Foucault, but also unequally distributed skewed toward some dominant people and groups. To understand this aspect, I employ Gramscian notions, e.g., hegemony. In regard to this, this study is primarily concerned
with the hegemonic status of the discourse of sŏnjin 'guk, that is, the conditions in which the discourse sŏnjin 'guk secured consent from a wide range of the Korean population, and served for the hegemony of developmental regime at the national level. In regard to this, I pay attention to the following aspects of the discourse of sŏnjin 'guk: its reflection of dominant developmentalists’ political economic interests; its successful association of the concept of sŏnjin 'guk with national-popular goal; and its attainment of consent from the general public. Thus, a research focus is on the historical circumstances of the emergence of the discourse of sŏnjin 'guk as a notable hegemonic discourse, having determined South Koreans’ national identities and worldviews in the post-colonial era.

Another important theoretical idea that I employ in this study is postmodernists’ suspicion of modern mentality searching for universal progress, certainty, and centrality.¹¹ In this regard, I consider that my dissertation is a critique of Koreans’

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¹¹ As Bauman (1992:viii) points out, “postmodernity means many different things to many different people.” In a similar vein, Nederveen Pieterse (1992:26) notes that “[p]ostmodern sensibilities are plural, protean, not reducible to a single view [. . .].” In fact, many theorists focus on different aspects of the postmodern vis-à-vis the modern according to their different theoretical backgrounds. Lyotard (1984), for instance, finds the postmodern mainly from the “incredulity towards metanarratives.” Bauman (1991) considers the “control of contingency” as the central point of modernity, and sees the postmodern as based upon the critical recognition of it. Theorists in the Marxist tradition tend to see the various aspects of the postmodern as reflecting the change of political economic conditions, such as those of “flexible accumulation” or “late capitalism” (Harvey 1989; Jameson 1991). In institutional terms, the postmodern is based upon critical attitudes towards the institutions constituting modernity, such as industrialism, surveillance, capitalism, the nation state, military power, etc. (Giddens 1990). On the basis of those perspectives, I consider that an important ground of the postmodern is the critical attitude towards modernity that has a tendency of emphasizing certainty, centrality, and universality. In this respect, the postmodern is concerned with “a heightened sensibility to instability, indeterminacy and transience” (Nederveen Pieterse 1992:26). In terms of development studies, the postmodern sentiment is based upon a wide range of attempt to go “beyond” the epistemic and institutional limitations of modernity, with the suspicion of a linear path of “human progress.” In this regard, Lemert (1997:xii) notes that “[p]ostmodernism, if it is about anything, is about the prospect that the promises of the modern age are no longer believable [. . .].” As for the historical background of the rise of postmodernism, he adds that “there is evidence that for the vast majority of people worldwide there is no realistic reason to vest hope in any version of the idea that the world is good and getting better” (ibid.).
modern mentality, which assumes an objective dichotomy between sŏnjin'guk and hujin'guk on a universal linear path of development.

My study is based also upon recognition that culture is a significant power affecting the materiality of society. For cultural theorists, as Friedland and Mohr (2004:28-9) note, “power is the capacity to produce the dominant categories of social life, categories that organize its materiality.” In this respect, I pay attention to the role of the discourse of sŏnjin'guk, as a specific form of culture, in constructing South Koreans’ national identities and worldviews, and directing the material transformation of the society.12 As hegemonic struggle involves denaturalizing taken-for-granted positivities of subordination (Laclau and Mouffe 2001), this study attempts to problematize and historicize the discursive system naturalizing the oppression of hujin'guk by sŏnjin'guk, or of various social relations by developmentalism.

Methodology

As noted, a practical goal of this study is to problematize and historicize the discourse of sŏnjin'guk, which is a popularly circulated taken-for-granted knowledge system.

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12 Among various uses of the concept of culture, I understand it mainly as the “entire way of life.” This does not mean that I do not recognize the usefulness of the concept of culture in other uses, such as intellectual properties, artistic products, etc. (Smith 2001). This conceptualization of culture as the entire way of life is distinguished from the Marxist base-superstructure model, which prioritizes the materiality of society over cultural aspects. This Marxist model presupposes not only that the economic is separated from the cultural but also that the former is the fundamental factor determining the epiphenomena of the latter. Disputing this binary model, recent cultural theorists tend to recognize that culture is “integral to the production of the social” (Friedland and Mohr 2004:2). In this perspective, culture is rather the social itself, than merely its component. For Laclau and Mouffe (1987, 2001), the formation of the social is a discursive formation. For them, no social relations and activities are possible without discourse. In this perspective, the conceptual boundaries of discourse, culture, and the social are blurred, and regarded as somewhat identical with one another. I understand that discourse is a specific form of culture, while culture is a more generic term encompassing specific discursive systems.
Thus, in terms of the sphere in which discourse is constructed, the focus of this research is primarily put on the public sphere: that is, how the discourse of sŏnjin'guk and related historical discourses are constructed in public fields in certain historical circumstances. In this respect, I use newspapers as main research materials, i.e., Korean newspapers representative of different historical periods.

As many theorists note, the mass media are a “field or space, in which contending discourses, offering different ways of looking and speaking, struggle for visibility and legitimacy” (Golding and Murdock 2000:85). While suggesting a “propaganda model,” Herman and Chomsky (1988:1) note that “[t]he mass media serve as a system for communicating messages and symbols to the general populace.” I understand newspapers in a market system as an important part of cultural industries, which play central roles in constructing and distributing public discourses. Newspapers communicate with the public and construct public discursive fields by producing meanings and symbols (Schudson 2003). As for the relationship between the sender and recipient of message, I am aware of that the “all-powerful media” model is too simplistic and the interpretation of media messages involves far more complex processes than was traditionally assumed (Hall 1980; Hay, Grossberg, and Wartella 1996; Bennett 1996).

As for the newspaper’s main function in society, two models are notable: one is the model of information and the other is that of public forum (Nord 2001). The model of information focuses on the newspaper’s role in providing information to social members. In this model, the newspaper is mainly considered as an institution reporting
“facts” from a detached stance from the empirical world. To keep journalistic “objectivity” is assumed to be the newspaper’s principal professional duty. In contrast, the model of public forum focuses on the newspaper’s function as a main institution making social issues and public opinions. In this model, the supposed cool-headed professional objectivity of the newspaper is a kind of “myth” as its covering, reporting, and editing processes are inevitably selective. As Nord (2001:7) notes, “facts do not speak for themselves; indeed, they do not exist until they are ‘constructed’ by someone as culturally significant.” Thus, the information, not to mention opinions, carried in newspapers inherently reflects certain ways of looking at the world. On these grounds, the public forum model pays attention to the newspaper’s role in building communities. The newspaper constructs the “public sphere” by facilitating conversations, opinions, and discourses among social members, which is an important precondition for building a community. In this regard, Nord (2001:2) points out that “[c]ommunities are built [. . .] in communication.”

Another important problem to consider in regard to the newspaper’s role is its materiality. This involves questions such as: what material conditions affect the newspaper’s construction of public discourses; and what opinions and values it is inclined to represent. As for this, liberal perspectives tend to perceive the press as the Fourth Estate, which plays a role for checks and balances vis-à-vis the government. In this respect, the newspaper is basically a free institution searching for truth and justice, serving for public interests. As such, the newspaper is an important pillar of mature democracy. In the history of the British press, newspaper enterprises employed this kind
of liberal views in their struggle with the government’s control in the mid-nineteenth
century, by emphasizing freedom and independence of the press (Boyce 1978). Against
“taxes on knowledge,” liberalists advocated the role of the press as a free institution
committed to facts and objectivity with keeping watch on the possibility of power abuse
by the government. In this perspective, the press is considered mainly as “the
institutional embodiment of the democratic principle of freedom of expression” (Curran
1978:51).

In contrast, critical perspectives argue that the entire notion of the Fourth Estate
is a myth, impossible in the empirical world. In these perspectives, the press is
inextricably interrelated with the political system (Boyce 1978). As the “fact” does not
exist until it is given cultural significance, the newspaper is to naturally reflect certain
political views in its construction of the facts. In particular, the press is likely to reflect
the dominant groups’ political economic interests in society, as its tone of argument is
conditioned by its materiality. In terms of materiality, not many newspapers are free
from the influence of political economic power, whether it is from the government or
from capital. In capitalist societies, the press is likely to be under the influence of
capital. In the case of Western industrial societies, especially the U.S. and Britain, the
press has generally come to be under the control of the “free” market since its
industrialization around the turn of the twentieth century (Curran 1978:67; Lee 1978).
Dependent upon advertising patronage in the competitive market system, newspapers
are susceptible to the dominant values of society for their survival as corporation. In this
context, Curran (1978:74) maintains that “most journalists have been socialised into,
and internalise, the dominant values of society.” Furthermore, the advertisement-dependent competition in the “free” market tends to bring about the concentration of ownership of the press in major companies, which enables the recognition of the press as industry. In this condition, the press is inclined to reflect the interests of capital.

Taking the positions of the forum model and the critical perspective, I consider the newspaper in general as a central institution engaged in the construction of public discourses that are likely to reflect the dominant values of society. In relation to community, I think that the newspaper plays an important role in creating a sense of community based upon common (dominant) values and worldviews. As Curran (1978:74) notes, the modern press “links together socially differentiated and geographically dispersed groups, emphasizing collective values [. . .] and collective symbols of identification.”

As with other phenomena, the historical background of the appearance and development of modern newspaper vary across societies. Unlike newspapers in many Western societies, which appeared mainly as a private institution in competition with state power, Korean modern newspapers started and developed in close relations with the state in various historical circumstances. Thus, the history of Korean modern newspaper strongly reflects the transition of political power. Considering newspapers’ main role in society, and its relation to the state and capital, I distinguish the following notable periods in the history of modern Korean newspaper: the periods of kaehwa (enlightenment) (1883-1910); Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945); U.S. military rule (1945-1948); the Lee Seung-Man regime (1948-1960); the Park Chung-Hee regime.
(1961-1979); the Chun Doo-Hwan regime (1980-1987); and the post-democratization (1987-).

In the period of *kaehwa*, newspapers were published mainly by the *kaehwa* intellectuals, who recognized a need for sharing information about the rise of “modern world” and distributing it to the public. In the face of the imperial expansion of the West, the Korean intellectuals began to be aware of the seriousness of the new world order and, thus, intended to publish newspaper as a way to “enlighten” (*kaehwa*) people about the changing world accompanying various new phenomena. With conservative traditional intellectuals having significant political power, the *kaehwa* intellectuals used newspaper as a major institution to publicize their voices for the reformation of the country.

In a situation where capitalist development was weak, newspapers generally maintained close relationship with the state in this period. The *Hansŏng Sunbo* (1883-1884), the first modern Korean newspaper, was published by the government. As for the purpose of publication, the *Hansŏng Sunbo* acknowledged that “it is to educate people internally, and to prevent harm and war externally” (Chung 1983:ii). As such, the Korean modern newspaper was born as a government project for the education of people, and pro-*kaehwa* intellectuals were actively involved in that project. After the *Hansŏng Sunbo*, private newspapers were published by various social, political groups, which included the *Tongnib Sinmun* (1896-1899), the *Cheguk Sinmun* (1898-1910), and the *Taehan Maeil Sinbo* (1904-1910). Despite the difference in detailed political

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13 Given that newspapers have relatively remarkable independence from governmental control after democratization (1987), I do not distinguish governmental changes for the last period.
position, those private newspapers generally showed a commonality in advocating the need for kaehwa and the transformation of the country to effectively deal with the challenges of the new world order. In this respect, they promoted the need for learning the West and criticized many aspects of traditional life. In relation to promulgating the need for kaehwa, they played an important role in raising national awareness in the face of Japanese and Western imperial expansions.

The government gave direct and indirect supports for the foundation and operation of the private newspapers, as is shown in the case of the Tongnib Sinmun whose foundational fund was given by Emperor Kojong. In terms of popularity, those early modern newspapers did not have large circulation. Generally, it is estimated that they had some thousand copies of circulation. In this respect, their popularity was quite limited to relatively a small number of privileged people, that is, those who were capable of reading and purchasing the newspapers. Nonetheless, with no comparable mass media existent, the newspapers played a central role in promoting kaehwa thought and national awareness in those times.

The period of Japanese colonial rule was the time when the endogenous development of modern Korean newspaper was seriously interrupted. In particular, the first decade of the rule from 1910 to 1919 is often referred to as the “period of darkness” in Korean journalism as no publication of Korean newspaper was permitted by imperial Japan (Chung 1990:312). It was not until 1920 when imperial Japan began to permit the publication of Korean newspaper. Intrigued by the March First Independence Movement in 1919 organized by Korean people nationwide, imperial Japan allowed the
publication of Korean newspaper as a way for more efficient colonial rule. Imperial Japan gave permits to those Koreans who they thought were cooperative to the colonial rule. In this situation, some Korean newspapers came into existence including the *Chosun Ilbo* (1920-) and the *Dong-a Ilbo* (1920-). Amidst severe censorship and oppression by imperial Japan, Korean newspapers in many cases made efforts to raise national awareness for independence. In this period, the Korean newspapers’ circulation generally reached tens of thousands. With the increase of circulation, they obtained an increased popularity, and some of them were able to grow to large industry in the 1930s (Park 2000).

In the period of U.S. military rule, the license system of the publication of newspaper changed to the registration system. As the military rule officially advocated the freedom of speech, the situation for the press became far better compared with the previous period of Japanese rule. However, this did not apply to leftist newspapers. The military rule severely oppressed leftist newspapers, as is well shown in the case of the suspension of the publication of the *Maeil Sinbo* in November 1945, which maintained a leftist stance and was critical of the military rule (Kang 2007:302-303). Despite the popularity of leftist ideologies and movements in Korea just after the independence from Japan, the military rule distributed the media properties obtained from imperial Japan only to the rightist people who they thought had pro-U.S. dispositions. In this situation, Korean newspapers generally showed a strong right-wing propensity in their ideological spectrum. In this regard, Cha (2000:143) points out that the Korean newspapers’ general ideological bias before democratization in the late 1980s is
historically rooted in the basic frameworks of journalism created through the periods of the U.S. military rule and the following Lee Seung-Man regime.

The Lee Seung-Man regime inherited the U.S. military rule’s oppressive policy on leftist journalism. In the wake of the Korean War, its anti-communist rhetoric and measures became stronger and the room for leftist newspapers got smaller. Even with rightist newspapers, it did not much tolerate the criticism of the government. Newspapers in this period are generally referred to as “political papers” in the sense that they had specific relationships with political parties. For instance, the *Kyunghyang Sinmun* was one of the representative journalism supporting the opposition party. In terms of circulation, the *Kyunghyang Sinmun* held the second rank with the circulation of 200,000 copies (Kang 2007:335). The Lee regime made this newspaper cease to publish in 1959, which signaled the collapse of the regime in the following year. As is shown by the circulation of the *Kyunghyang Sinmun*, newspapers in general made a considerable growth in the industrial sense, but their freedom of speech was continuously checked by the state.

The basic framework of the relationship between the press and the state in the period of Park Chung-Hee regime was established in a series of harsh policies on the press made just after the success of Park’s coup in May 1961. A small number of newspapers, which were in particular subservient to the regime, survived through those policies. In relation to its emphasis on national economic growth, the Park regime supported the growth of newspapers as industrial enterprise. Thus, while controlling criticism of government policies, the Park regime provided various special benefits to
newspaper corporations and provided a good environment for their industrial growth (Kang 2007:459).

With the rapid national economic growth, this was the period when the industrial growth of the press was notable. The size of circulation rapidly increased: for instance, the total number of circulation grew twice in just six years, from 740,000 in 1961 to 1.5 million in 1967 (Kang 2007:460). Accompanying this, dependence on advertisement for newspapers’ revenue rapidly increased. This tendency became stronger in the 1970s. The total number of newspaper circulation became 5.4 million in 1980, which was far greater than 2 million in 1970 (Kang 2007:532). Ju (2000:166) suggests four main factors for the rapid increase of circulation through the 1960s and 70s: the improvement of living standard; the increase of nuclear families; the increase of the need for knowledge and information; and the increase of competition in circulation among newspapers. Thus, while being restricted in their freedom of speech, newspapers could achieve much growth in industrial terms due to economic growth and urbanization in this period.

The policies on the press exercised in 1980 just after the success of the military coup led by Chun Doo-Hwan is regarded as another massive attack on journalism, along with those conducted by the early Park regime. The Chun regime’s merger and abolition of the mass media created a favorable environment for those cooperative with the regime. Somewhat similar to the previous period, this was the period when newspapers continued rapid industrial growth. The reduction of the number of the mass media resulted from the regime’s policies contributed to the growth of a small number of large
newspaper corporations. In particular, the growth of the conservative *Chosun Ilbo*, the biggest newspaper today, was notable in this period.

After democratization, the relationship between the press and the state dramatically changed. Above all, the post-democratization period witnessed the apparent weakening of the state power vis-à-vis the industrially grown newspapers. The foundation of the *Hankyoreh* in 1988, which was unique in the history of world journalism in the sense that its ownership was shared by 27,000 ordinary people, signaled the re-appearance of “leftist” mainstream journalism critical of conservative ruling groups. Reflecting the growth of capital and the increase of its power vis-à-vis the state after democratization, the indirect control of the press by capital, rather than the direct state control, became notable in this period.

Another notable phenomenon in this period is the emergence of the digital and broadcasting media. Even though newspapers obtained relative power in relation to the government, their relative influence on the public weakened with the rise of the new media, especially the internet after the late 1990s. The number of internet users reached 13 million in 2000, which was one out of every 3.24 persons of the population (Kang 2007:662). Various kinds of “cyber community” and “cyber culture” made a boom among young generations in the late 1990s, and the social, political influence of the internet as a type of interactive communication media rapidly increased (Kim 2008). Along with this, the journalistic influence of the broadcasting media grew fast, vis-à-vis the printed media. With the launch of the era of cable TV in 1995, there was a dramatic growth in the number of TV channel. In the same year, various regional private
broadcasting corporations came out to compete with the preexistent public broadcasting systems. In this regard, the total number of broadcasting TV channel went up from 4 in 1990 to 46 in 1999 (Lee 2000:250). With the popularity of the digital and broadcasting media, the newspaper corporations made efforts to expand their business to those newly emerging areas in this period.

Examining the discourse of sŏnjin’guk popularly constructed in the public sphere, this study pays attention to a popular form of the media for its research material. In this respect, other sources, such as government documents, are limited in their popularity. On the ground of the history of Korean newspaper briefly mentioned above, this study chooses to analyze newspapers for the following three reasons. First, as printed media, the newspaper is a more appropriate form of the media for delivering sophisticated information, idea, and knowledge. This aspect of newspaper is compared with the broadcasting news media, which pursue relatively quick information and simple ideas. In this respect, I consider that the information and arguments carried in newspapers are more sophisticated and, thus, more suitable to the analysis of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk as a system of knowledge.

Second, newspaper journalism has historically been the most influential media for the Korean public opinion. It is a relatively recent phenomenon that the broadcasting media began to be recognized as an important journalism in the Korean context. The status of TV and radio as journalism is well shown in the fact that the reporters in those media were not included in the press group for many institutions until the 1970s. In this regard, the journalists for newspapers were reluctant to recognize those in TV and radio
as colleagues with such a perception as “is broadcasting journalism?” (Choe 2002:450) One of the important reasons why broadcasting did not get much recognition as journalism was that it was started by imperial Japan as a colonial institution and played a major role as a public propaganda institution for the regimes of dictatorship afterward. In relation to this, the broadcasting media were generally regarded as the media for entertainment, e.g., soap opera, rather than for information and opinion.

And last, the newspaper is more appropriate form of the media for historical research as it is one of the easiest and oldest forms of the media for preservation. In this regard, the broadcasting media have relatively a short history and do not provide sufficient materials for the early periods of Korean modern history. The history of radio in Korea began in the 1920s and that of TV in the 1960s as state projects, but the access to their materials is far limited compared with newspaper materials. In this regard, the internet offers a more serious problem for historical research due to its far short history.

This study employs two main qualitative research methods: discourse analysis of newspapers and semi-structured interview skills (Denzin and Lincoln 1998, 2005). For the analysis of the contemporary discourse of sŏnjin’guk, I investigate three leading newspapers representing either conservative or progressive voices in the South Korean political context, such as the Chosun Ilbo, the Dong-a Ilbo, and the Hankyoreh. For the analysis of the historical variation of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk from the 1950s to the present, I focus on the Chosun Ilbo, one of the most traditional conservative newspapers representing a mainstream voice in the country. For the historical analysis of the kaehwa and munmyŏng discourses, I look at early modern newspapers in the late
nineteenth and early twentieth century, such as: the Hansŏng Sunbo (1883 - 1884) and the Hansŏng Jubo (1886 - 1888); the Tongnib Sinmun (1896 - 1899) and the Taehan Maeil Sinbo (1904 - 1910); and the Chosun Ilbo and the Dong-a Ilbo (both 1920 - ).

In order to analyze challenges and resistances to the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, I interview representative persons from various counter-developmentalist social groups, using semi-structured interview techniques (Fontana and Frey 2005). The primary reason for employing interview skills, rather than analyzing documents, is that those social groups do not actively respond to the discourse of sŏnjin’guk at the public level as its basic concepts and assumptions are so naturally accepted among the wide population.

Chapter Organization

This dissertation consists of five substantive chapters. Employing historical approaches, the first and third chapters examine the historical transformation of discursive foci from kaehwa (enlightenment) and munmyŏng (civilization) to sŏnjin’guk. The second and fourth chapters look into the discourse in terms of the contemporary historical phase, focusing on its concepts, representations, and characteristics, on the one hand, and the contestations over the discourse, on the other hand. The last chapter adopts a comparative transnational approach, and explores the commonalities and differences among the dominant discourses of three neighboring East Asian countries.

In detail, the first chapter examines historical roots of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, focusing on temporal differences within kaehwa and munmyŏng discourses,
and historical continuities and discontinuities between them. Koreans’ discourses of *kaehwa* and *mumyŏng* popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century reflected their acceptance of Western interpretations of the world and their willingness to learn the West in the competitive Eurocentric world order. This chapter examines the formation and transformation of those discourses in terms of the historical backgrounds of the appearance of the discourse of *sŏnjin’guk*. The second chapter examines basic assumptions and characteristics of the discourse of *sŏnjin’guk*, focusing on its Eurocentric bearings. It investigates the ways of how Eurocentric representations of the world are reflected and naturalized in the discourse; how South Koreans negotiate and reconstruct their national identities in the hierarchy of the discourse; and how they imagine the future of their society based upon it.

The third chapter aims to examine the historical transformation of the discourse of *sŏnjin’guk* from the 1950s to the present, and the historical conditions that entailed its formation and transformation. It investigates the changing connotations, political implications, and interpretive frameworks of the discourse and the historical conditions associated with them. The fourth chapter examines the contestations over the discourse of *sŏnjin’guk*. For this, it pays attention to how the discourse of *sŏnjin’guk* is perceived, contested, and challenged by various counter-developmentalist social groups. And the last chapter analyzes different national self identities, perceptions of the West, and subjectivities of modernities among three East Asian countries. Through the comparative analysis of the discourses of Korean *sŏnjin’guk*, Japanese *nihonjinron*, and Chinese new nationalism, this chapter argues that the three neighboring East Asian
countries express somewhat different modern identities and worldviews from one another.

Based upon the notion of discourse as a system of relations meaningful only within the system itself, this dissertation pays attention to how central concepts of the concerned discourses take on regularities and, thus, construct representations within the discursive systems in regard to Koreans’ perceptions of national self vis-à-vis the West. In particular, chapter one examines the discursive formations surrounding the concepts of kaehwa (enlightenment) and munnyŏng (civilization). Reflecting Foucault’s idea of the rupture and discontinuity in identifying objects across historical knowledge systems, this chapter attends to a rupture in Koreans’ representation of the West between pre-kaehwa and kaehwa periods. In this regard, the status of the West dramatically changed from “barbarians” to “kaehwa-guk” or “munnyŏng-guk,” which shows that the nature of the West is basically Koreans’ discursive construction, rather than an entity “out there” waiting for epistemological discovery. Given that both objects and subjects are defined within the system of discourse, this chapter aims to examine how the West is differently represented in relation to Korean national identity within the discursive systems of kaehwa and munnyŏng.

When it comes to the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, the West and Korea are related with each other in a far different discursive system from those of the previous periods. Within the system of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, Korea and the West take on regularities in relation to each other around the concepts of sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk. In this respect, chapter two aims to analyze the basic structure of the discourse of
sŏnjin’guk. Considering that the hierarchical conceptual structure of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk reflects the Eurocentric hierarchy between the West and the non-West, this chapter investigates the basic elements of the discourse, such as central concepts, representations, and characteristics. Its main foci of discourse analysis are on: how the central concepts of sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk are constructed and represented; how these two are related with each other; and how South Koreans construct their national self in relation to those concepts and representations. With regard to the notion of discourse, this chapter pays attention to that different concepts are defined and ordered in a way they create a system of relations, constituting the basic structure of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk. And, chapter three focuses on how the formation of relations between Korea and the West has changed through Korean modern history, which brought about variations within the discourse of sŏnjin’guk reflecting different historical circumstances.

Significance
The significance of this study can be considered in terms of global studies, cultural studies, development studies, and Korean studies. As for global studies, this study examines the impact of the global discursive change, along with the hegemonic transition, in the postwar era on the discursive formation and transformation at the national level, with the case of Korea. The findings of this study would provide a detailed knowledge of the historical interactions between global and national hegemonic discourses, which reflect certain global and national power relations. In regard to
cultural studies, this study explores Korea’s modernization process from a cultural perspective, focusing on the formation and transformation of taken-for-granted dominant discursive systems. Based upon discourse theories, Gramsci’s idea of hegemony, and Foucault’s ideas of knowledge and power, this study analyzes the discourse of sŏnjin’guk as a hegemonic knowledge system having legitimated the formation of Korean developmental regime and its drive for Korea’s modernization and economic development.

In terms of development studies, this study investigates the role of “development” as a hegemonic discursive formation in the transformation of Korean society. It examines Korea’s development process, focusing on the formation and transformation of a dominant knowledge system giving legitimacy to it. And as for Korean studies, this study provides important knowledge of Koreans’ (re)constructions of national identities and worldviews vis-à-vis the West in the post-colonial context. In relation to this, it also contributes to the studies of Korean Eurocentrism, by showing that the discourse of sŏnjin’guk is a primary Eurocentric interpretive system justifying the epistemic hierarchy between Korea and the West.
The late nineteenth century in Korean history witnessed a sea change in Koreans’ perception of the world. In terms of the history of Eurocentrism in Korea, in particular, it was the time when Koreans started to recognize the reality of the Eurocentric world order and accept Eurocentric interpretations of the world. In the face of Western imperial expansion accompanied by the discourse of civilization, the previous Confucian ethics-based perception of the West as “barbarians” began to lose intellectual hegemony and the new perception of it as the “civilized” started to gain power. Recognizing the seriousness of the new world order in the “age of empire” (Hobsbawm 1987), Koreans realized that their country might not survive without substantial material power, and started to be curious about the secrets of the power of Western countries. In this context, pursuing national wealth and strength, kaehwa (enlightenment) theorists in the late nineteenth century first tried to modernize Korea modeling the West (Kang 1985; Lee 1989; Shin 2000).

Discourse, as a socially constructed system of meanings and relations, provides a way of identifying and interpreting the world, reflecting certain power relations (Foucault 1976, 1980; Laclau and Mouffe 1987, 2001). In this respect, kaehwa and munmyŏng (civilization) discourses, reflecting early Korean modernists’ ways of interpreting the world, played a great role in “modernizing” Korean society. A
noticeable feature of these discourses was their Eurocentric classificatory system of various forms of societies, in which the type of Western societies was ranked the highest. Reflecting the global discourse of civilization, which was premised upon a hierarchical distinction between civilization and barbarism, kaehwa and munmyŏng discourses were, basically, grounded upon a distinction between kaehwa and mi-kaehwa (unenlightenment), and between munmyŏng and yaman (barbarism), respectively. For instance, a representative kaehwa theorist Yu Giljun (1856-1914) categorized countries in the world into a three-tier classification system: kaehwa-guk (enlightened country), pan-kaehwa-guk (half enlightened country), and mi-kaehwa-guk (unenlightened country) (Yu 2004).

In these representational frameworks, the non-West tended to be represented as the deficient counterpart to the sufficient West (Y. Chung 2004; Gil 2004; J. Kim 2005). Set as a deficient being, mi-kaehwa-guk continuously dreams of achieving the status of kaehwa or munmyŏng, based upon a feeling of shame at the self of mi-kaehwa or yaman (Gil 2004). In this process, people in the supposed mi-kaehwa-guk or yaman-guk project their negative values into the representations of their society as mi-kaehwa or yaman and positive values into those of the West as kaehwa or munmyŏng. In the case of Korea, kaehwa and munmyŏng frameworks contributed to the construction of Koreans’ “auto-Orientalism” by assuming the supposedly deficient aspects of the Korean society as something existent in Western societies (Y. Chung 2004). In this way, non-Western worlds internalize the two important pillars of Eurocentrism: European exceptionalism and Orientalism (Kang 2004). This internalization process of Eurocentric assumptions
does not necessarily occur voluntarily, but is rather strongly affected by the competitive world order.

Although preexisting researches tended to focus on distinctions between kaehwa and mi-kaehwa, and between munmyŏng and yaman, which were the primary features of kaehwa and munmyŏng discourses, they did not pay sufficient attention to contextual differences in the basic assumptions of those discourses across time. In fact, kaehwa and munmyŏng discourses were not unitary and consistent throughout periods, and nor were Koreans’ perceptions of national self and the world. Rather, as historical constructs, the discourses transformed their basic assumptions and connotations reflecting the changes of historical circumstances. For instance, despite the prevalence of the munmyŏng discourse in the 1900s, Koreans often showed a sense of superiority vis-à-vis the West and imperial Japan in the spiritual, historical, and cultural terms, and this tendency became strong in the 1920s when the Western discourse of civilization lost authority in the wake of World War I. Besides, while the concept of munmyŏng referred virtually to Western civilization in the 1900s, it took on universal bearings by admitting diverse equally-valued regional civilizations in the 1920s and 30s.

Given those aspects, this chapter aims to analyze historical continuities and discontinuities of the assumptions and connotations of kaehwa and munmyŏng discourses across early modern periods of Korea. It pays attention to the fact that Koreans’ perceptions of national self and the world, the West in particular, changed in relation to the contextual transformations of the discourses in their early periods of interactions with the West. There were continuities and discontinuities, and remains and
changes in the transitions of the discourses, reflecting national, regional, and global historical circumstances.

In this regard, this chapter focuses on three notable periods: (1) the 1880s, when the new recognition of the West as another civilization with material wealth and strength gained power; (2) the 1890s - the 1900s, when kaehwa and munmyŏng discourses became popular with regard to Koreans’ perception of national self and the West; and (3) the 1920s - the 1930s, when the munmyŏng discourse developed under Japanese colonial rule. For each period, it analyzes two representative newspapers showing Korean modernists’ interpretations of national self and the world.

For the first period, it investigates two old newspapers: the Hansŏng Sunbo (1883-1884) and the Hansŏng Jubo (1886-1888). The Hansŏng Sunbo is known as the first modern-style Korean newspaper, which was published by early kaehwa theorists working in the government to distribute kaehwa thoughts to the public. After this newspaper ceased to publish due to Kapsin chŏngbyŏn (the failed three-day coup) in December 1884, the Hansŏng Jubo succeeded it. As the whole articles of the Sunbo and the majority of the articles of the Jubo are written in Chinese characters, this study uses a Korean translation version edited by Chung (1983). Among various types of articles, this study focuses on “kakguk-kŭnsa” (international news) in the Hansŏng Sunbo and “saŭi” (editorial) in the Hansŏng Jubo, which are especially relevant to the perceptions of the West and other international affairs. Besides, as “kakguk-kŭnsa” usually cited foreign news sources, “saŭi” is especially focused, which directly reflects the newspaper’s own perspectives.
For the second period, this study analyzes two representative private newspapers: the Tongnib Sinmun (1896-1899) and the Taehan Maeil Sinbo (1904-1910). The Tongnib Sinmun is the first private modern newspaper in Korea published by influential pro-West modernists, and the Taehan Maeil Sinbo is a modern newspaper best representing national voices during the 1910s under Japanese colonial threats. Using the Korea Integrated News Database System, I obtained articles for these two newspapers. In order to see Koreans’ perceptions of the West in relation to kaehwa and munmyŏng discourses, I used seven keywords for article search: “sŏyang” (the West), “oeguk” (foreign country), “sŏnjin” (advanced), “munmyŏng” (civilization), “kaehwa” (enlightenment), “kurap’a’” (Europe), and “yaman” (barbarianism). Limiting the search to editorials for manageability, I obtained total 326 editorial cases (81 for the Tongnib Sinmun and 245 for the Taehan Maeil Sinbo).

And for the third period, this study investigates two representative newspapers: the Chosun Ilbo and the Dong-a Ilbo. These were founded in 1920 and have been influential journalism in Korea until today. For this period, it focuses on the binary distinction between munmyŏng and yaman. Using these keywords on the Chosun archive, I obtained 353 article cases for “munmyŏng” and 62 for “yaman.” From the Dong-a data base, I collected 410 cases for “munmyŏng” and 60 cases for “yaman.”

In order to see the nature and characteristics of kaehwa and munmyŏng discourses, and historical continuities and discontinuities between them, this chapter analyzes the contexts in which the key concepts are used in each newspaper. Main research questions are: what concepts and discourses were used for Koreans’
representations of national self and the world for each period; and, how did Koreans’
perceptions of the West and their self-identities change through the historical periods?

This chapter is organized in three main sections according to periodization. First
section investigates how early Korean modern newspapers perceived national self and
the West in the 1880s. Second section examines how Korean modern newspapers’
perceptions of national self and the West were reflected in the discourses of kaehwa and
munmyŏng in the 1890s and 1900s. And third section analyzes how the munmyŏng
discourse in the 1920s and 1930s was similar to and different from the discourses in the
previous periods.

APPRECIATING THE POWER OF THE WEST:
THE HANSŎNG SUNBO (1883-1884) AND THE HANSŎNG JUBO (1886-1888)

The late nineteenth century was the period when Western economic and military power
began to be recognized by Koreans. Their traditional gaze of ignorance and hatred at
“Western barbarians” started to change in this period. National independence being
threatened in the hostile world circumstance, which was created by imperial Western
expansion, Koreans started to recognize a need for learning the West as a way to raise
their national wealth and strength. In this situation, primary values of the Hansŏng
Sunbo and the Hansŏng Jubo with regard to national and international affairs were
concentrated in such concepts as “pugang” (wealth and strength), “puguk kangbyŏng” (wealthy nation and strong military), and “chagang” (self-strenuous effort).

In these early modern newspapers, the West was, first of all, recognized as a world of material wealth and physical power. The newspapers threw envious eyes on the achievements of the West in the fields of economy, machinery, technology, and military. They hoped to make Korea achieve wealth and strength by learning the merits of Western systems in those fields. Above all, Western economic systems were recognized as a basis for their wealth and strength, as reflected in an article of the *Sunbo*:

These days, Western countries establish companies to draw merchants, which is actually the ground for pugang. [...] In Western countries, steamships run on the sea, freight cars run on the ground, and electric wires are laid and streetlights are turned on, the wonders of which are beyond description. They wield wealth and strength all over the world and show dignity to their neighbors by sending forces to every sea and commerce with all countries, which is unprecedented. This has been possible only since they established company. (Chung 1983:38)\(^\text{14}\)

This article noticed the importance of company as a main source of the wealth and strength of Western countries. This was a far departure from the traditional Confucian value system that somewhat ignored material values in pursuit of mental and ethical values. The term “pugang” was a key word in this article, in which the writer’s aspiration was condensed. The things made with engineering and scientific technologies, such as steamships, freight cars, and electric wires, were referred to as the indices of “pugang.” In terms of the possession of those things representing material development,

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\(^{14}\) All citations of the *Hansŏng Sunbo* and *Jubo* are from Chung (1983), so I indicate just page numbers for them hereafter.
the gap between the West and Korea was seriously recognized. The article emphasized that the West was the subject of “pugang” and the main secret of it was the establishment of company.

Another important perceived feature of the West was its military power. The West was conceived of primarily as the world-dominating military power, based upon the development of machinery, technology, and industry. The newspapers recognized that material wealth (pu) and military power (kang) were not separated, but closely intertwined with each other. With regard to this, an article of the Sunbo introduces Britain like this:

Mainland Britain is just an island country, but has early developed navigation skills and exerted its ambition around the world, broadening its territories, by taking advantage of machinery. [. . .] Britain puts its top priority on military affairs. It subjugates its tributaries by making many warships and completing military preparations, and always keeps the full number of military with an ambition of dominating its neighbors. [. . .] British people respect for manufacture and make many convenient machines, and their “puguk kangbyŏng” is the best in the world. (93-5)

The change of the perception of the West accompanied the change of the understanding of the world order. With regard to this, the newspapers thought that the newly emerging world order is not ideal at all, but deplorable because of its militaristic, competitive, and power-dominating features. The spread of social Darwinist ideas contributed to justifying the world order, but it was too far from the ideal one that Koreans usually imagined. In this regard, the Sunbo mentions that “countries in the world are now all concerned with military affairs and compete with one another to become more powerful” (115). As for the dominance of the West in this new world, an
article of the *Jubo* writes that among numerous countries in the six continents, “only the countries in Europe monopolize wealth and strength, and many countries in other five continents are in the situation of being subjugated” (748).

The world order was also mistrusted in relation to international treaties. In this regard, the *Jubo* regrets that “the countries [in the East and West] are not afraid of ignoring public laws in front of self-interests, and do not feel shameful of annulling treaties” (748). This perception of the world circumstance played a role as a solid ground upon which the newspapers actively promoted the need for raising Korea’s wealth and strength for itself. This attitude of accepting the deplorable world situation as a reality was distinguishable from that of the traditionalists who still tended to deny participation in the “barbaric” world. This world situation provided ample reasons for building a strong military, and for the accumulation of wealth. As for this, the *Sunbo* emphasizes that:

> Generally, the military is deadly weapon. However, the reason to build the military in spite of knowing its evilness is not to exercise violence but to prevent war. It is urgent today, but one cannot merely build the military. It needs sufficient wealth. (115)

In this context, a significant degree of mistrust was shown towards the West. In the newspapers’ perceptions, not only was the West militaristic but was untrustworthy. Rather than promoting universal values, as in the argument of “civilizing mission,” the West was mainly perceived as behaving out of its own self-interests with a certain degree of hypocrisy. For the newspapers, the West was the main subject responsible for putting the world under the law of jungle and the logic of power. In this respect, the
colonialist discourse of civilization did not get hegemony in Korea at the time. With regard to this, the *Jubo* writes that:

The people who busily interact with one another only aim at profit, so how can we say that there is no law of the jungle? For example, France first subjugated Vietnam as its tributary, and England subjugated Burma. France and England always took treaties and international laws as the golden rule, but they have eventually subjugated others, while insisting benevolence and righteousness [. . .]. (842)

Wariness to Westerners was often explicitly expressed in the newspapers. Reporting Western countries’ aggressive attitudes against other countries, the *Sunbo* deplores that “an old man did not deceive me, who said that ‘[Westerners] were not our race and their mind was always different [from ours]’” (541). An article of the *Jubo* says that “one should be very careful when interacting with foreigners” (842). As such, Western wealth and strength, aggressiveness, and self-interestedness were not perceived separately, which was far from Eurocentric yet.

For *pugang*, the newspapers upheld the need for learning Western social, cultural, political, and economic systems, such as commerce, economy, education, laws, etc. These are the fields that were particularly regarded as the main sources of the wealth and strength of the West. The pursuit of Western systems went along with the recognition of the “impracticalness” of traditional values, and the reformations of social, cultural, and economic systems were urgently raised. With regard to education, for instance, the *Jubo* argues that “everyone thinks that it is most important to establish schools, modeling after the Western system, whereby raising necessary brains and making them a basis for self-reliance” (717). As for the importance of commerce, the
Sunbo argues that “without [commerce], all farming and crafts would become impoverished, and [. . .] people cannot maintain their lives” (38). In relation to this, some articles criticized Koreans’ conventional ways of life as somewhat lethargic and, thus, unsuitable for the dangerously competitive world. An article of the Jubo, for instance, regrets that “having accustomed to peace for a long time, our people have been satisfied with small achievements, have not pursued development, and, eventually, have made a habit of idling and playing, with lavishness being a custom” (779).

However, while recognizing the wealth and strength of the West, the newspapers did not conceive of the West as superior or advanced entity as is usually assumed in Eurocentric discourses. Rather, they showed pride in their own history and civilization, and a kind of surprise at the “abrupt” rise of the West. With regard to the “rise” of Britain, the Sunbo says that “England was destitute just a short time ago with a short history, but it has achieved this development. We may well research what made it possible” (97). Citing a Chinese journal, another article of the Sunbo mentions that “in ancient times, no country was more destitute than the West and no country was worse in luck than the West” (137). As such, the newspapers thought of the “rise of the West” as a recent, incidental phenomenon. This perception supports a type of historiography that tends to consider the “rise of the West” as much later phenomenon than is assumed by Eurocentric historiography, e.g., circa 1800 (Frank 1998; Pomeranz 2000; Hobson 2004; Nederveen Pieterse 2006). Furthermore, in the face of Western belligerence, the
newspapers maintained a sense of superiority over the West in ethical and spiritual aspects.

In a similar vein, natural circumstances and the sizes of population of the West were not considered as reaching those of the East either. This perception of the West became a basis of the newspapers’ confidence in Korea’s potential in its pursuit of national wealth and strength. With regard to this, the Jubo argues that:

Our country is blocked by seas in three directions, its soil is fertile, and its population is prosperous. Its mountains, rivers, and seas are abundant, and, moreover, its transportation is convenient. If making efforts in the policies of “pugang” with these good conditions, we will be able to reach almost the six continents, going ahead of other countries.” (794)

Although arguing for reformations in various fields modeling the West, the newspapers did not quest for them blindly. They, rather, thought that the reformations should be conducted in prudent ways. In this regard, while the two newspapers are known as published by kaehwa theorists, it is interesting that the Jubo criticized kaehwa people’s supposedly hasty attitudes. It points out that “people who are now mentioning kaehwa thoughtlessly have the names in vain, but do not know much about reality [. . .]” (842).

15 The traditional distinction between civilization and barbarism depends upon whether one knows Confucian ethics or not. Confucianism in the Korean tradition is a philosophical effort to understand the principle of the universe. In this framework, humans and human society are basically defined and understood as parts of the whole universe (Choe 1997). As for its cyclic conceptualization of time, Choe (1997:121) notes that “when a principle of the universe gets to the end, it starts again, so it becomes limitless.” As their learning and practice were based upon self-discipline in pursuit of the principle of the universe, Confucians’ primary interests lay in spiritual, rather than material, aspects (Chang 1996; Hyun 2003). In this respect, “li” (interest) was conceptualized as somewhat opposite to “ūi” (virtue). In this framework, Western civilization based upon material and military powers were short of the Koreans’ traditional concept of munnyŏng.
Summary

In short, the 1880s was the period when Korea started to recognize the power of the West and the reality of the world dominated by physical power. Perspectives on the world, reflected in the Hansŏng Sunbo and the Hansŏng Jubo, were a far departure from those of traditionalists, who put priority on Confucian ethics. Unlike the traditionalists’ views, which basically regarded the West as “barbarians,” the modern newspapers argued for learning the merits of Western systems, as a way to raise national wealth and strength, and ultimately to maintain national independence in the face of Western expansion.

However, their perceptions of the West in this period were not necessarily Eurocentric. In their perceptions, the West was wealthy and powerful being, but not superior being. The West was frequently recognized as self-interested, belligerent, and untrustworthy, and, thus, not reaching the ethical and spiritual level of Korea and the East. For the newspapers, the “rise of the West” was a recent and incidental phenomenon and thus could be outrun by Korea and the East on their strong strenuous efforts, which supposedly had better historical, cultural, and natural conditions. Korea and the East were still supposed as the possessors of better ethics and cultural heritages while the West was perceived mainly as the promoter of technology and industry. In those respects, the colonialist discourse of civilization could not exercise its hegemony in Korea in this period. As for the Sunbo’s and Jubo’s perceptions of the world, Gil (2004:66) appropriately states that “the ‘East’ was still civilized countries, and, at the same time, the ‘West’ was also civilized countries in the sense that they were wealthy
and technologically advanced.” In these old modern newspapers’ interpretive frameworks in the 1880s, there was yet no apparent Eurocentric hierarchy between Korea and the West.


The Tongnib Sinmun (1896-1899)
With regard to Korea and other East Asian countries’ responses to the West in the nineteenth century, three temporal phases can generally be distinguished: the phases of hostility, limited acceptance, and all-out acceptance (J. Kim 2005). If the period of the Hansŏng Sunbo and Jubo was that of limited acceptance, recognizing Western power with great caution, the period of the Tongnib Sinmun and the Taehan Maeil Sinbo could be considered as that of all-out acceptance. This was the period when Korean modern thinkers started to show somewhat uncritical attitudes of approving Eurocentric assumptions and ideas. Tongnib Sinmun writers frequently showed an attitude of observing Korea from the perspective of “civilized man” by internalizing that of the West (S. Chung 2004). In this regard, Gil (2004:73) points out that “it was the period of the ‘Tongnib Sinmun’ when [the meaning of] ‘munmyŏng’ was totally transformed into Western civilization [. . .].”
In fact, when it comes to the Tongnib Sinmun in the 1890s, a perceptual hierarchy between “the West and the Rest” is somewhat distinctive (Hall 1996). An article of it, for instance, classified countries in the world into four hierarchical categories according to the degree of kaehwa, such as: kaehwa (enlightened), pan-kaehwa (half-enlightened), mi-kaehwa (unenlightened), and yaman (barbarian).16 Departing from the idea of the previous period in which Korea was perceived as another civilized country with long history and valuable cultural heritages, the Tongnib Sinmun positioned it at the status of pan-kaehwa in the classificatory system of the kaehwa discourse. In this perceptual framework, only the West (including Japan in many cases) was in the category of true kaehwa.

The most popular concept in which the need for learning the West was condensed in this period was kaehwa.17 As for this, the Sinmun says that “the term kaehwa is originally created in Ching. It means that one should work on everything according to its reality, with reason by enlightening ignorance” (30 June 1896). In fact, the concept of kaehwa at the time was so popular that people listened to it to “make

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16 As for these categories, the newspaper explains that: “the country of yaman is called as the bottom level. They have little knowledge and thus cannot do duties as humans, and just eat fish and wild animals without knowing how to cook with grains. [. . .] The country of mi-kaehwa has a little knowledge and they can keep livestock and manage agriculture, but do not respect for study and system is inconsistent. [. . .] It is not that the country of pan-kaehwa does not make efforts on people’s works in every field, but always respects for old customs and looks down on new information. [. . .] In the country of true kaehwa, people are good at various skills and techniques, with developed knowledge, and wealth is affluent by the promotion of business, and people make efforts for progress every day, pursuing good studies [. . .]” (11 September 1899). In Sŏyu Kyŏnmun, which was published in 1895, Yu Giljun, one of the most famous kaehwa theorists at the time, classified countries into three categories: “mi-kaehwa,” “pan-kaehwa,” and “kaehwa” (Yu 2004).

17 The term “sugu” was used as an opposite term to kaehwa. In this regard, an editorial of the Tongnib Sinmun reports a person’s saying that “when talking about rural people’s living, one may not know whether it is kaehwa or sugu [. . .]” (2 November 1899).
their ears worn” (2 November 1899). In addition to this, other terms such as munmyŏng and chinbo (progress) were also used to mean the positive transformation of the country.

In this period, the West was represented by such positive terms as “kaehwa-guk” (enlightened country), “munmyŏng-guk” (civilized country), “munmyŏng-kaehwa-guk” (civilized enlightened country), “sangdŭng-guk” (upper-class country), and “ildŭng-guk” (first-class country), implying the highest stage of civilization. The social, cultural, political, and economic systems of the West were somewhat idealized at the expense of the deepening of supposed undesirability of non-Western societies including Korea. Various aspects of non-West worlds including Korea and China were disrespected vis-à-vis the West in this perceptual framework. In this regard, an editorial of the Tongnib Sinmun writes that:

Even a country in Europe, whose size is just a tenth of Ching’s, gets treated by the world ten times better than Ching, and its government and people are hundred times stronger. This is because in European countries, regardless of their sizes, every man and woman learns various studies at least ten years, whereas Ching just learns the old Seven Chinese Classics. Thus, the reason why Ching always gets defeated by foreign countries is that people in munmyŏng-kaehwa countries know how to train military [. . .]. (25 April 1896)

Korean traditional systems and customs were criticized for the country’s weakness. Traditional intellectuals sticking to Confucian values were frequently designated as “sugu” (the conservative in a negative sense) and the need for kaehwa was actively promoted. In this context, an article argues that “if Korea wants to keep the country to next generations forever, it needs to abandon wrong old customs and to learn good systems and Western studies” (20 January 1899). This, yet, does not mean that
kaehwa intellectuals totally relinquished pride in their country’s cultural heritages. Rather, they also regarded Korea’s cultural and natural conditions as a potentiality for its success in the future, although the degree of pride in them might not have reached that of the previous period. With regard to this, the Sinmun argues that:

Korea is one of the big countries in the world, and its land quality is the best in the East and its climate is also good, and thus various grains, fruits, and vegetables would become comparable to those of Europe or America. As there are limitless amount of gold, silver, cooper, and coal, Korea would also become a sangdang country in the world if we make efforts on this land. (30 May 1896)

It is also apparent that Western knowledge and ideas were somewhat uncritically accepted. In this respect, various colonial and racial ideas, which were prevalent in the West at the time, spread in Korea without undergoing any suspicion of their Eurocentricity. Many of them maintained their intellectual authority under the name of “science,” and Eurocentric ideas were often imported in the form of “scientific knowledge,” such as ethnology, geography, anthropology, etc. An editorial, for example, introduces a Western study, which argues for the superiority of Western dietary life:

According to the analysis of various grains by Western chemists, wheat flour is the best for human body, corn is the next, and rice has the least nutrients. We may easily know superiority and inferiority between them by witnessing the robustness of Westerners, who eat wheat flour, and the weakness of Easterners, who eat rice. (25 August 1898)

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18 With regard to racial studies, for instance, an editorial says that “in foreign countries, a study called ethnology is a great study and people studying ethnology are very respected” (6 April 1897).
Another editorial argues for the superiority of Western and Japanese customs over that of China:

Koreans always say that it is a strange custom that Western women make their waist thin, that Japanese women paint their teeth, and that Ching women bind their feet. If we consider the merits and demerits of these in terms of people’s living, painting teeth and thinning waist are not harmful for working, but the custom of binding feet not only obstructs work but also is harmful for health [. . .]. (14 October 1899)

This kind of perception well reflected the reversed statues of China and the West on the international stage at the time. An important political implication of this perception was that it could serve for the powerful countries’ colonial purposes. The supposedly rational subject’s interventions of the non-rational subject’s affairs were justified in this kind of hierarchical perceptions. In this regard, the newspaper adds that “it is truly wonderful that Western women try to establish chŏnjokhoe [foot-binding club] these days, to change the bad custom of Ching’s foot-binding” (14 October 1899).

As for British colonization of India, an editorial directly expresses a colonialist perspective:

After England first conquered India, they lamented people’s ignorance there, and decided to educate them with new studies by spending 40,000 ryang of silver annually [. . .] It is commendable that new studies are greatly promoted in India [. . .]. (20 September 1899)

This kind of perception, however, did not remove Korean modern thinkers’ feeling of concern about Western expansion. Some editorials explicitly show their uneasiness about the aggressive outreaches of the West. With regard to this, an editorial
writes, “Generally, Westerners aim to get rid of different religions and dominate other races. They try to make themselves high alone by seeing high and walking broad in the world” (9 November 1899). Given Korea’s troubled situations surrounded by imperial powers, however, many Korean modern thinkers might have had to observe the behaviors of Western countries with a somewhat mixed feeling of awe and envy.

_The Taehan Maeil Sinbo (1904-1910)_

The 1900s in Korean history was the period when Japanese colonial intention came to the fore, under the legal discourse of international law system approved by Western countries (Dudden 2005). In this circumstance, Korea’s deplorable situation was well recognized by the _Taehan Maeil Sinbo_, and the need for learning the West was urgently advocated in this context. Lamentation over the national situation intensified towards the year of 1910 when Japan “officially” colonized Korea.

The _Sinbo_ interpreted the deplorable national situation in a historical and civilizational perspective. As did many Korean intellectuals at the time, the newspaper contrasted Korea’s boastful civilizational status in the past with its contemporary miserable situation in the context of the rise of the West. As for this, an article of the _Sinbo_ deplores the Korea’s situation like this:

Alas, the Korean peninsula, why have you alone met such a bad luck? With miserable appearance, you are not like England that has broad territories around the world, not like Germany that sheds the bright luster of studies, and not like the U.S. that boasts great wealth [. . .] You also produced heroes, were wealthy and strong, and were civilized in the past, and thus when China and India shined, you also arose with them. When such countries as Japan did not have the name of nation at the beginning, you
already showed the development of culture. Alas, aren’t you considered as a brother for China and India, and a senior for Japan? Then, how could you lose the past honor and meet this tragic bad luck today? (27 March 1909)

Despite their desperate efforts for learning the West, many Korean modern thinkers did not abandon whole pride in their country’s cultural heritages and traditions. Rather, as shown in this article, they tended to interpret the Eurocentric hierarchy as “reversed” in a short period of time and, thus, temporary. The pride in Korea’s past made the newspaper writers feel far much sorry for their country’s current situation. They were curious about the causes of the country’s being in such a deplorable situation insofar as the causes were not considered as rooted in its historical inferiority. For this, an article of the Sinbo focused on the problem of kaehwa:

The reason why our country today is in this pitiful situation is not that people do not have power but that we thought of kaehwa too late [. . .] About seventy to eighty years ago when Western missionaries came to our country, if the government had known where our benefit was, it might have made treaties with Western countries through them, instead of killing them, and been able to do true kaehwa, maintaining national independence. However, it did not open its door at the time and came to be forced to open it today [. . .]. (21 August 1907)

The term kaehwa was still a popular and influential concept in this period, in regard to the acceptance of the West. However, the frequency of its use was far reduced, with the use of the term munmyŏng on the increase. In data for this study, the number of cases containing the term kaehwa was 16 in the Tongnib Sinmun and 13 in the Taehan Maeil Sinbo, while the number of cases containing the term munmyŏng was 4 in the former and 118 in the latter. Given this, the 1900s was the period when the primary
concept expressing the need for modernization was in transit from *kaehwa* to *munmyŏng*.

In the face of the national crisis, the binary perception of the West and the East deepened. While the strength of the West was idealized, the deplorable national situation made Koreans harsh on themselves. Many aspects of Korean society were easily subject to self-criticism, which became a solid pillar of Koreans’ self-Orientalism and Eurocentrism. An article of the *Sinbo*, for instance, writes that “across the past and the present, and the East and the West, no other public officials do not do their duties than those in Korea today, and no other ordinary people are unenlightened than those in Korea today” (6 October 1908). In contrast, another article argues that in the West “hope for humanity is unlimited and human progress is also unlimited […]” (13 August 1908).

As a main threat to Korea’s independence, Japan’s status was also contrasted with Korea’s. The achievement of Japan, which went through the *Meiji* restoration, was well evaluated by the newspaper. It sought for the secret of the wealth and strength of Japan from its “successful” accommodation of the West. Korean modern thinkers took on the significance of the “learning the West” attitude in front of the power of Japan, which they traditionally regarded as a kind of *yaman*. However, although recognizing the *kaehwa* or *munmyŏng* status of Japan, the newspaper did not lose a sense of superiority towards Japan in historical and cultural terms. Showing confidence in Korea’s potentiality, the *Sinbo* argued that Japan’s advance over Korea was temporary and merely a matter of learning the West.
In this sentiment, the subjugation of Korea by Japanese colonialism was considered as unacceptable. In this regard, a sense of superiority over Japan in historical and cultural terms played an important role in promoting resistant discourses to Japan’s colonial intent against Korea. With regard to this, an article of the *Sinbo* argues that:

> In the past, Japan was a country that learned *kaehwa* from Korea. Its shintoism was created based on the things from the *Shilla* kingdom, its Confucianism and Buddhism were imported from the *Paekje* kingdom, and other engineering and arts were all learned from Korea. So, no matter how Japan’s power today is prominent, the Koreans have the willingness to fight against it, but do not have any intention to surrender, and thus will not tolerate colonization. (7 January 1910)

In this situation, Korean modern thinkers tended to think of the learning of the West as the only practical way to fight against Japanese colonialism and ultimately retrieve sovereignty.

Reflecting the Korea’s situation, on the other hand, the negative perception of the world order intensified. An article of the *Sinbo* says that “today’s world is the world of blood. Civilization cannot be bought without blood, and wealth and strength are not achievable without blood [. . .]” (16 May 1908). Some articles used the concept of “*chegukjuŭi*” (imperialism) for their understanding of the world. An article, for instance, says that “as this world is that which respects for imperialism, the stronger subjugates the weaker [. . .]” (22 February 1910). On the other hand, yet, these situations were not merely regarded as deplorable, but considered as a reality in which Korea had to engage in. Affected by social Darwinism, which had spread to Korean intellectuals through various routes of translations, some articles of the newspaper even advocated the logic
of the “survival of the fittest.” In this regard, an article praises the idea of Darwin, arguing that competition is the vehicle of progress (11 August 1909).

Summary

When it came to the Tongnib Sinmun and the Taehan Maeil Sinbo, a hierarchy between the West and the East appeared manifest. In their perceptions, the West was mainly represented as a world of kaehwa or munmyŏng while the East including Korea and China were pan-kaehwa or pan-munmyŏng. In terms of the history of Eurocentrism in Korea, the 1890s and 1900s can be regarded as a critical period when the Eurocentric hierarchy between Korea and the West appeared and developed. The most popular concepts that reflected the need for modernizing Korean society in regard to the learning of the West were kaehwa in the 1890s and munmyŏng in the 1900s.

Koreans’ acceptance of the Eurocentric hierarchy did not occur automatically, but occurred amidst the hostile expansion of the West. Confronting a situation where national independence was threatened, Korean modern thinkers blamed tradition for the country’s weakness, and advocated the need for learning the West. They thought that the active acceptance of the West was the only way to maintain national independence and to compete in the world. Japan’s “successful” embracement of the West through the Meiji restoration often functioned as a model for some Korean modern thinkers’ promotion of reformation.

On the other hand, Korean modern thinkers in this period thought that the rise of the West and Japan was temporary. Despite its supposed second-tier status in the
discourses of kaehwa and munmyŏng, for them, Korea was still a country that had brilliant historical and cultural heritages, as well as good natural conditions. In this respect, the Eurocentric hierarchy was not considered as inherent and permanent, but incidental, temporary, and thus reversible. Korean modernists’ perception of the hierarchy was thus based upon actual power difference, rather than the intrinsic nature of societies. That is to say, although the discourses of kaehwa and munmyŏng reflected Eurocentric stage theory, which assumed the advancement and universality of European societal systems to some extent, they did not consider the “progress of Europe” as rooted in European inherent superiority. This is a clear difference between Koreans’ version of Eurocentrism at the time and ordinary Eurocentric ideas, which are obsessed with European exceptionalism.


The Crisis of the Munmyŏng Discourse

In the wake of World War I, the early 1920s witnessed the serious undermining of the authority of Western civilization across the world. In front of the unprecedented tragedies and atrocities committed by the so-called munmyŏng-guk or “civilized countries,” the belief in “human progress” and the argument for “civilization mission” were seriously doubted. This historical situation provided a ground for Koreans to
question the universality as well as desirability of Western civilization, which was considered virtually equivalent to civilization itself in the previous period. As for the concept of munmyŏng, thus, Koreans developed somewhat relative perspectives on it and began to appreciate the values of various civilizations in different regions. And, the West was no longer regarded as an ideal world, which was a far departure from the epistemic attitude in the previous periods.

The undermined authority of the West and Western civilization is easily observed in the newspapers in the 1920s. Far from idealizing the West, the newspapers often described it as a world of uncertainties and confusions. Under the title “The new tendency of Western civilization after world war,” for instance, the Chosun Ilbo points out that “recent Europe is a term of transition and a world of confusion. These transition and confusion are unique phenomena to Western countries after the big war” (30 April 1921). As discourse reflects power relations, the demise of the authority of the West was closely associated with the crisis of the discourse of civilization. In this respect, its basic assumptions, which had been taken-for-granted before, started to be questioned. The Korean newspapers raised some basic questions about it such as: “What is munmyŏng?” “What is yaman?” In this vein, the Eurocentric way of distinguishing between civilization and barbarism was challenged. The civilization supposedly promoting the logic of power was severely criticized in this period especially as Koreans were direct victims of colonial rule.

As for the concepts of munmyŏng and yaman, a column of the Chosun argues that “it is clear that a people who ignores humanity with mere belief in power is yaman,
and that a people who loves peace and respects for justice is munmyŏng” (20 June 1921).

By this criterion, the West was not necessarily a world of munmyŏng. On this ground, this column goes on to harshly criticize the pursuit of power by the West:

If that Western scholar argues that psychology, politics, institution, and economy are the elements of civilization, and exaggerates that they themselves are the civilized people, this is a bias of provincial pride and racial arrogance. This is because, when we look into their psychology, what lofty mind do they have, individually or nationally, except for invasion, plunder, misconduct, and pilferage? The extreme material development has contributed to humans’ living, but invention and discovery are all for them. If there are no manners, nor is the sense of shame. Even if they exist, they are just display and deceit. If we call them munmyŏng-in [civilized people], this is not different from calling a thief as a kunja [a man of virtue]. (Chosun 20 June 1921)

On the basis of this redefined concept of munmyŏng, the column concludes that peace-loving civilization such as Korea’s is true munmyŏng.

The undermined authority of the West also well appeared in the discredit to its universality. As its universality was doubted, the West had to reposition itself as a region (of confusion and transition), instead of the world, and so did a nation in the West as a political entity legitimate within its national boundary. In this regard, an article of the Dong-a (27 June 1921) criticized an argument of the British media that Britain’s parliament was an institution for world peace:

The first Imperial Conference of Britain after world war was held in London [. . .] The British media designate it as “the institution of world peace” and compare it to the League of Nations. We are to comment on this interesting matter that as merely a meeting of Britain, the Conference discusses its national interests, that is, national defense, foreign policy, and the relationships between main land and its tributaries. Then, why do they call it as the institution of world peace?
The concept of munmyŏng in this period strongly reflected Koreans’ sense of victimization. That is to say, their discredit to the West or the conventional notion of munmyŏng echoed their feeling of being victimized by a country that claimed itself as munmyŏng-guk. In this respect, the re-conceptualizations of munmyŏng and yaman were closely related to resistance to colonialism. By defining a civilization promoting the logic of dominance by power as pseudo-munmyŏng or yaman, and peace-loving civilization as true munmyŏng, Koreans sought for justification for their resistances to the Japanese colonial rule. In this regard, an article of the Chosun (13 November 1925) reports an address of Lee Sangje, then president of the Chosun Ilbo, under the title “Rise, the youth of Korea, who are infringed by the civilization of invasion”:

The president of this newspaper, Lee Sangje, slowly approached the podium and addressed, under the title of “the responsibility of the youth,” that the youth of Korea should stand up, who are infringed by the so-called modern violent science and the civilization of invasion. He said that in order to save the world, the youth in Korea should rise first than those in any other country that is infiltrated by money and perverted science, to conquer the world of evil with the great power of true love [. . .].

The Reconstruction of the Munmyŏng Discourse

With the image of the West seriously damaged, the concept of munmyŏng took on different bearings to recognize the values of various regional civilizations. While munmyŏng referred virtually to Western civilization in the previous period, it came to connote a society’s certain degree of artificial achievement, which was distinguishable from the state of nature (Dong-a September 15, 1925). In this sense, the concept of munmyŏng came to take on diversity and specificity to pay attention to various kinds of
civilizations, such as civilization of spirit, civilization of material, civilization of science, civilization of peace, civilization of Tao and virtue, civilization of invasion, civilization of the East, civilization of the West, etc. The concept of munmyŏng was no longer monopolized by the West. Rather, Western munmyŏng, as one of various forms of munmyŏng, was often regarded as materially developed but lacking spiritual and harmonious aspects. As such, the connotations of the concept of munmyŏng significantly changed while the term was continuously used. If the concept of munmyŏng in the previous period was stuck to a kind of “European universalism,” the concept in this period became somewhat closer to the notion of “universal universalism,” which recognized the common ground of munmyŏng out of the diversity of humanity (Wallerstein 2006).

In this respect, it is obvious that the Eurocentric hierarchical system with the West in the highest rank also collapsed. There was no ideal image of Western civilization at the expense of other civilizations, such as Korean and Eastern ones, which were frequently stigmatized as irrational, unscientific, and unpractical in the previous period. Rather, Western civilization (sŏyang munmyŏng) was regarded as a mere regional civilization with its unique characteristics, and so was Eastern civilization (tongyang munmyŏng). An article of the Chosun (26 July 1921), for instance, refers to Eastern civilization as todŏk munmyŏng (civilization of Tao and virtue) and Western civilization as kwahak munmyŏng (civilization of science). This article well demonstrates a relativist perspective on the two regional civilizations:
If we would like to discuss the values of rise and decline by the situations of the East and the West, they [the West] may see us lacking material development, but may not be able to say that our ethics vanished too. Similarly, when seeing them, we may not be able to say that their scientific civilization is not developed just because they are weak in ethics. (Chosun 26 July 1921)

Upon this basis, it raised a need for combining the merits of the two civilizations:

Therefore, as Eastern civilization has maintained its center with Tao and virtue so long, it would enjoy the permanent peace when combining Western civilization of science, and at the same time, they may not either be able to ignore this kind of exchange value. (ibid.)

With regard to the “universal universalism” of the concept of munmyŏng, the newspapers showed a tendency of considering it in terms of humanity, which had various kinds of sub-munmyŏng, such as Eastern and Western ones. On this ground, the specific values of certain regional civilizations were judged by their contributions to the broader universal concept of munmyŏng. As a product of human efforts, munmyŏng was considered as “making human behaviors progress from stark animality to humanization” (Dong-a 15 September 1925). This ideal and universal type of munmyŏng was conceptualized in close relation to the promotion of peace and humanity. With regard to this, the Dong-a (15 September 1925) says that:

When seen outside, munmyŏng is all artistic activities and methods, wealth and prosperity, and thus industry and commerce, or science and machinery, but when seen inside, it is impossible without respect for humans, taking responsibilities, and compatibility that is based on understandings and contacts among people.
When judged by this concept of *munmyŏng*, Western civilization tended to be regarded as lacking the latter aspect of inside virtues. This is one of the most obvious departures from the 1890s and 1900s when Western civilization was considered as on the top stage of civilizational development and thus virtually equivalent to the term *munmyŏng* itself.

In terms of the contribution to humanity, the importance of material values, e.g., the development of science and technology, was still recognized. The concept of *munmyŏng* often provided justification for the pursuit of science and technology. In this respect, the concept of *munmyŏng* functioned as a stimulus to Koreans’ situation of lagging behind the development of science and technology. As for the German airship Graf Zeppelin’s historic first round-the-world flight in 1929, an article of the Dong-a (20 August 1929) reports that:

> What kind of feeling do Koreans have, merely seeing this rapid progress of science in wonder? As there are no trains and steamships that are made by us, and there is no place for us to make even a cheap car, what face do we have to the world? As we are not behind the consumption following the trend, without contributing to constructions of creative cultures, the damage to our honor as a people and a world citizen is too severe. In the past, we have invented and built the “Turtle Ship,” metal type, and *ch’ŏmsŏngdae*. We had the finest craftworks such as the pottery of the *Koryŏ* Dynasty, gold crowns, and gold shoes. However [. . .].

As expressed in this article, it is also notable that Koreans developed a certain degree of identity as world citizen under the concept of *munmyŏng*. In relation to this, a perception was somewhat popular that the world was being closely connected by the development of communication and transportation technologies. Somewhat similar to the contemporary notion of globalization, the perception of “one world” developed to a
In this way, the distance becomes shortened day by day and the world is becoming a family both nominally and virtually. As the national economy leaps to the world economy, world rich class and world poor class come to confront each other. It is not strange that thoughts are spreading through the air and an incident taking place here today moves around the whole world tomorrow. [. . .] The conditions for the realization of world peace and world organization are getting better daily [. . .].

*The Munmyŏng Discourse for Resistance or Domination*

In the historical context in which the scramble of imperial countries was rushing to its doom, another notable use of the concept of civilization (*munmyŏng*) in this period was its functioning as a political tool in international politics. As a discourse reflecting power relations, the discourse of civilization was used by countries to judge others for political purposes. For Koreans, it provided criteria for judging Japanese colonial policies. Hence, the concept of *munmyŏng* was a ground upon which they criticized the colonial rule and revealed its unjustness. Colonial countries, on the other hand, appropriated it as justification for their interventions of weaker countries. In the discourse of civilization, labeling barbarism played an important role in damaging the legitimacy of a certain political group, which, in turn, legitimatized resistance to, intervention of, or domination of that group, depending upon power relations.

In terms of the relationship between Korea and Japan in the discourse of *munmyŏng*, Japanese oppressive colonial rules frequently fell into the category of *yaman* by the criteria of *munmyŏng*. In this regard, the newspapers often pointed out
that Japan’s oppressive rules contradicted its self-claim to munmyŏng-guk. In this way, the newspapers tried to lead Japanese colonial activities in a desirable direction by using the concept of munmyŏng. As for Japanese police’s use of inhumane interrogation methods, such as torture, the Chosun (9 March 1923) argues that “there is no torture for the judicial systems and police of munmyŏng.” In another article, the newspaper raises a need for “civilizing the police,” arguing that:

A reason why we desire for a munmyŏng society and rational systems is that we can live relieved when our lives, properties, freedoms, and honors are guaranteed. If our lives and properties are threatened, and freedom and honor are infringed in the so-called munmyŏng and law-governed society, we would rather prefer to go back to the primitive society and live in the unenlightened society. (Chosun 12 July 1924)

In this article, the “primitive” or “unenlightened” society is contrasted with the “munmyŏng” and “law-governed” society. And, the munmyŏng society is imagined as a society in which individuals’ lives, freedoms, and properties are guaranteed on the basis of just judicial systems. In this respect, the article points out that there is a contradiction between the rhetoric of Japan as munmyŏng-guk and the reality of its colonial rule.

Exposing realities contradictory to the ideal of munmyŏng, this article aims for policy changes. With regard to this kind of the politics of munmyŏng, another article of the Chosun (9 September 1924) seriously criticizes the harshness of the colonial police:

But, we cannot help but feel horror and shivering, which may appear in a martial law area or in a revolution period, in watching various policies of the police and the policemen’s high-handed authorities. We feel a shivering horror by the patrol policemen’s violence including killing, injuring, and assault, or their daily-occurring misconducts, which are heard daily but are not freely released. [. . .] Then, how could
the Japanese say about their munmyŏng, and how could they hide their barbarity? Rather, we, as barbarians from the Japanese perspective, criticize the self-styled civilized Japanese for the remaining of such practices.

The munmyŏng discourse also exerted its reflexivity on power relations at the individual level, by providing criteria for judging an individual’s behaviors. In a similar way to the functioning of the discourse at the international level, the discourse also played a role in inducing individual behaviors in a “desirable” way. In this regard, individual behaviors that were considered as not reaching the expectations of the munmyŏng society were subject to criticism. An article of the Chosun (6 June 1921), for instance, reports a Japanese couple’s inappropriate sexual behavior on the train, questioning that “could they still call themselves as munmyŏng-guk citizens?” As shown in this article, the operation of the discourse at the individual level was often closely interrelated to international politics. Another article reports a Japanese attempted murder, questioning “how could a people of the so-called munmyŏng make light of one’s life like this?” (Chosun 22 May 1924) On the other hand, some Japanese also tried to stigmatize Koreans as yaman. In this regard, some articles report Korean students’ protests against Japanese teachers’ designations of Koreans as yaman (Dong-a 26 October 1925; 1 March 1926; 3 November 1927).

While the discourse of munmyŏng was used as a discourse of resistance in ways as noted above, colonialist countries used it against others for their political purpose of domination. In this regard, some articles reported conflicts between Italy and Ethiopia over the former’s designation of the latter as yaman. As for this, the Dong-a (13 September 1935) reports:
Ethiopia asks the League of Nations for the dispatch of investigators to examine the validity of Italy’s argument that Ethiopia is a yaman-guk. Even if the Italian government has presented the proof showing Ethiopia as a yaman-guk, with a summary of a written document of the denial of Ethiopia, it can be said to be fabricated.

On the other hand, an article of the *Chosun* (26 September 1935) reports that Italy criticized the League of Nations for its treatment of Ethiopia as munmyŏng-guk. Shortly after these reports, Mussolini’s Italy invaded Ethiopia.¹⁹

*Munmyŏng, Yaman, and “Scientific Knowledge”*

Despite the drastic changes of the connotations of the discourse of munmyŏng in this period, the authority of “science” did not much wane. In this regard, the discourse’s binary distinction between munmyŏng and yaman was shored up by a variety of “scientific” form of knowledge generated from the West. Much of “scientific” knowledge came from such academic fields as ethnology, anthropology, genetics, medical science, etc. Yet, it is interesting to note that many “scientific” findings introduced in the newspapers become nonsensical from today’s perspective. Citing an

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¹⁹ It is interesting to note that the identity of yaman-guk was received in a derogatory sense in the discourse of munmyŏng. As noted above, the designation of someone as yaman could instigate a conflict. In terms of international relations, this is a noticeable difference between the discourse of munmyŏng and that of sŏnjin’guk (or discourse of development). Unlike the identity of yaman-guk, the designation of a country as hujin’guk, “underdeveloped,” or “developing” does not invoke a strong resistance from the country. Rather, the distinction between the “developed” and the “developing” is even accepted by the “developing” themselves within the framework of the discourse of development. In fact, the antagonistic relationship in the discourse of civilization turns into the reciprocal one in the discourse of development. As for this, Rist (1997:74) appropriately states that “[c]olonized and colonizer had belonged to two different and opposed universes [. . .] Now, however, ‘underdeveloped’ and ‘developed’ were members of a single family” (emphasis in the original).
American genetics scholar’s study, the *Dong-a* (16 July 1926) reports that the more people are civilized, the higher are their noses:

> Through human history, there was no hero who had a low nose. […] The barbarians in Africa and Australia have somewhat higher noses than monkey’s, but have lower noses than those of the extinct people of the Stone Age. This demonstrates that the Stone Age people were not barbarians, despite their childishness. However, as barbarians and primitive people of the Stone Age were stupid and had short knowledge, compared with modern superior civilized races, their noses were low and ugly, and it is hard to find among them such high and shapely noses as those of modern people’s. The beautiful nose necessarily indicates the superior civilized race, as was the case with the Egyptians, the Greeks, and the Romans. History and pictures prove that, among civilized races, the famous people who dominated the races had distinctively high noses. This was proved by an American doctor “Wood” […]

Some other articles introduce a similar kind of racial propositions in relation to *munmyŏng*, which are also controversial from today’s perspective: for instance, there is no wisdom tooth for civilized people as a result of thorough evolution (an English scholar’s finding; *Dong-a* 26 June 1929); civilized people have round-type faces (an American dental scholar’s finding; *Dong-a* 11 February 1939); and civilized people talk fast (an English stenographer’s finding; *Dong-a* 8 August 1936).

*Other Faces of Munmyŏng*

Another notable characteristic of the *munmyŏng* discourse in this period was that its dark sides were also recognized. This was another departure from the attitude in the previous period when the concept of *munmyŏng* virtually referred to Western civilization with idealized images. Some opinion columns and articles of the newspapers point out the awkwardness and dangerousness of *munmyŏng*. In this context,
the concept of munmyŏng was often used in reference to “modern” civilization. An
opinion column of the Dong-a (13 July 1935) written by a woman intellectual, for
instance, expresses a concern about the infringement of Koreans’ cultures and identities
by munmyŏng:

Looking down the downtown of Seoul from the high point of Mt. Pugak, we can see the
structure of the city shining with munmyŏng. […] We may not distinguish Seoul from
the West or Japan. This is the landscape achieved by the benefit of munmyŏng these
days. […] However, from the perspective of Korean munmul [culture and material],
this progressive and luxurious phenomenon, on the contrary, loses its genuineness and
does not have the unique local color at all. It is so awkward, bothersome, uneasy, and
uncomfortable that I feel as if we inhaled that munmyŏng in a wrong way. […] People
from the U.S. try to follow the U.S., and people who studied in Japan try to copy Japan.
Culture and munmyŏng are to be different according to each people and custom. […]
Of course, it is good to know our situation and accept [other] munmyŏng as a
supplement for our custom, which can be said as the benefit of munmyŏng, otherwise, it
is deplorable thing.

As a resistance to the concept of munmyŏng as modern civilization, the
appearance of a relativist perspective on munmyŏng is also obvious. According to an
article of the Chosun (28 May 1931), Eskimo’s munmyŏng is different from that of the
West, and one cannot say which one is superior. Rather, this article argues that
munmyŏng is even not reaching yaman in terms of the spiritual aspect. It points out the
inhuman aspects of a munmyŏng society, compared with a warm and simple primitive
society:

According to Mr. Masuss’s perspective on munmyŏng, [who is an Eskimo young man
who recently visited the U.S.,] munmyŏng is very superficial and it is behind of the
Eskimo country in terms of the spiritual aspect. That is, he emphasizes that whereas
munmyŏng people do not care about other people’s starving or sickness to death, people
in the Eskimo country would give them foods and treat them for free. *(Chosun* 28 May 1931)

*Munmyŏng* was also regarded as accompanying a lot of side-effects such as crime, disease, and pollution. In this respect, while the U.S. was conceived of as boasting the most prosperous material *munmyŏng*, the dark side of it was also discussed. Under the title of “U.S. *munmyŏng* surrendered before crime - the overflow of tremendous criminals,” an article of the *Dong-a* (9 May 1936) reports about the high crime rate of the U.S. In a similar vein, another article of the *Dong-a* (18 June 1938) writes that:

New York city in the U.S. does its best to remove criminals, but big crimes continuously appear, as if all of the world’s big crimes occur in the U.S. […] A reason why these horrifying crimes occur in the U.S., which boasts of the best *munmyŏng*, is that it is somewhat hard to reduce this kind of crimes as New York city is created by people from various countries.

On the other hand, under the title “A slice of U.S. *munmyŏng* - massive private punishments against blacks,” an article of the *Dong-a* (14 June 1936) reports in detail an incident of “white” people’s reckless killing of black brother and sister in Virginia. About this, the article says that the “white” people “divided the bodies into parts and took each part as a memento,” and adds that “there is something hard to understand in Americans’ psychology” *(ibid.)*. As for an incident of hundreds of Japanese’s invasion of a town, which accompanied firing, killing and injuring, and the destruction of houses, the *Chosun* (21 January 1925) calls it the “barbarity of human beings” and adds that “[…] human beings do not seem to be able to handle their instinctive urge of animality.”
With this kind of incidents, the conventional Eurocentric distinction between *munmyŏng* and *yaman* had to be somewhat blurred, and the need for diversified understanding of *munmyŏng* got power.

The perception of the dark side of *munmyŏng* was related to Koreans’ pessimistic view on international circumstances. The newspapers reported the possibility of another large-scale conflict among Western powers. An article of the *Chosun*, for instance, argued that “world conflicts will be caused by conflicts among capitalist countries” (February 20, 1926). Another article warned that “war between Britain and the U.S. will be the destruction of Western civilization, and war between Japan and the U.S. will be a nightmare” (*Chosun* 4 May 1927). In this respect, Koreans perceived the West as the sources of both advanced technology and world conflict in this period. This conflicting perception reflected Koreans’ skepticism about the progress of Western material civilization.

**Summary**

The 1920s and 30s were the period when the universality of Western civilization was highly suspected. In the wake of World War I, which was committed by the so-called *munmyŏng-guk*, the authority of the West and Western civilization was far weakened in this period. The concept of *munmyŏng* came to take on relativist and diversified bearings, recognizing the values of various civilizations. In this respect, Western civilization tended to be perceived in a limited sense as a material one while Eastern civilization was regarded as a spiritual and ethical one. Various civilizations were rather
considered as having their own strengths and weaknesses, and thus basically being in equal positions with each other.

The concept of munmyŏng played a role in international politics by providing causes for resistance or domination. In the context of Japanese colonial rule, the concept of munmyŏng was appropriated for the purpose of resistance by Koreans. By arguing that brutal ruling methods, such as torture, were not supposed to be adopted by munmyŏng-guk, Korean newspapers tried to induce the Japanese rule in a desirable direction. At the same time, by revealing the unjust behaviors of the so-called munmyŏng-guk, Korean opinion leaders called for resistances to unjustness. In this context, peace-loving civilizations such as Korea’s were often designated as “true” munmyŏng.

While the concept of munmyŏng diversified, the distinction between munmyŏng and yaman was still maintained. A lot of “scientific” knowledge, much of which was nonsensical in today’s perspective, was imported from the West to strengthen the Koreans’ distinction of munmyŏng and yaman. On the other hand, many negative aspects of Western material civilization were also recognized, which was an apparent departure from the previous period’s tendency of idealizing Western civilization.
This chapter has examined that Koreans’ early modern perceptions of national self and the West have variations from period to period, reflecting different historical circumstances. In this sense, the natures of kaehwa and munmyŏng discourses, in which Koreans’ modern understandings of national self and the world were concentrated from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, were not unitary, but multifarious.

In the 1880s, Korean modernists did not have a hierarchical perception between Korea and the West. Recognizing the reality of Western material power, they reflected their ways of looking at the West mainly in such terms as “pugang” and “chagang.” Although the West was regarded as a subject of wealth and strength, it was not yet perceived as a superior entity vis-à-vis the East including Korea, which supposedly had longer history and richer cultural and natural heritages.

It was the 1890s when the Eurocentric hierarchic classifications of the world began to appear in modern Korean newspapers. In the kaehwa discourse, countries were classified into hierarchical categories according to the degree of kaehwa, such as: kaehwa, pan-kaehwa, mi-kaehwa, and yaman. Positioning Korea and China in the group of pan-kaehwa vis-à-vis the kaehwa of the West, the kaehwa discourse showed a strong Eurocentric feature, departing from the traditional perception of the West mainly as “barbarians.” In terms of popularity, the prevalence of the munmyŏng discourse in the 1900s succeeded that of the kaehwa discourse of the 1890s. However, kaehwa and munmyŏng discourses showed a difference from usual Eurocentric discourses in the
sense that they thought the “rise of the West” as temporary. Still keeping pride in Korea’s cultural and natural heritages, the discourses considered that the hierarchy could be reversed on Koreans’ hard efforts.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the nature of munmyŏng discourse drastically changed in the wake of World War I. While the concept of munmyŏng virtually referred to that of the West in the 1900s, munmyŏng in this period was rather regarded as a universal concept with Western and Eastern civilizations as its regional constituents. Unlike the hierarchical perception in the previous period, the spiritual richness of Eastern civilization vis-à-vis the material advancement of Western one was re-valued. In this discursive framework of munmyŏng, Korea became one of munmyŏng-guk with affluent and peace-loving cultural heritages. In the wake of the wars and colonial dominances, committed by the countries self-claiming munmyŏng-guk, the newspapers in this period also recognized the hypocrisy and dark sides of (muljil) munmyŏng.
CHAPTER 2
THE DISCOURSE OF SŎNJIN’GUK: CONCEPTS, REPRESENTATIONS, AND IDENTITIES

The discourse of sŏnjin’guk is a historically constructed knowledge system based upon the discursive relations constructed around the concepts of sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk. Reflecting the transition of global discursive focus from “civilization” to “development” in the post-colonial era, South Koreans have constructed their national identities and worldviews around those concepts. One of its most notable characteristics is a hierarchical distinction between sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk, in which the former has the latter as its alienated other. In constructing the concepts of sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk, South Koreans projected their positive and negative developmental values into them respectively. Frequently referring to Western countries as sŏnjin’guk, South Koreans tend to idealize those countries. As an ideal image, sŏnjin’guk has played an important role in guiding the transformation of the Korean society, as an urgent national goal and a central reference point. So widely used and taken-for-granted discursive system in the contemporary era, it exerts great influence on Koreans’ imagination of their country’s future.

This chapter examines the characteristics of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk in the contemporary context, focusing on its basic concepts, representations, and social roles. It aims to answer main research questions: what are represented in the discourse and how they are utilized in the Korean society. Through the analysis of three leading South
Korean newspapers from 2000 to 2008, it tries to figure out, first, the meanings of the discourse’s two primary concepts, sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk, along with their roles, attributes, and contexts in which they are used. Second, it investigates how these concepts are represented in terms of political, economic, social, and cultural aspects. And last, it explores how the discourse is related to South Korea’s constructions of its national identity and worldview.

Methodologically, this chapter analyzes the editorials of three leading newspapers in South Korea: the Chosun Ilbo, the Dong-a Ilbo, and the Hankyoreh. This selection encompasses a broad ideological spectrum of the society as the first two deliver conservative voices and the latter progressive one. According to a survey on the subscription rate of the print media in the Seoul metropolitan area in 2006, the Chosun Ilbo was the most read newspaper with 13.5 percent household subscription rate (Lee 2006). The Dong-a Ilbo took the third position (8 percent), and the Hankyoreh the seventh (1.3 percent). In another survey in 2006, the Hankyoreh was selected as the most trusted newspaper by South Korean journalists, with a reliability rate of 15.0 percent (Chang 2006). The Chosun Ilbo and Dong-a Ilbo are the two most traditional leading newspapers.20 Given that targeting all newspaper articles takes extreme time-consuming efforts and resources, I have limited research focus to editorials, which are a type of news articles best representing newspapers’ opinions.

Thus, this chapter analyzes the three newspapers’ editorials from 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2008. The selection of the period is somewhat arbitrary, but I consider

20 Both newspapers were founded in 1920, and the Hankyoreh in 1988.
that this is a reasonable recent historical period that demonstrates the contemporary form of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk. Using the Chosun Ilbo archive, I obtained 277 cases of editorial for this newspaper, which contained the term sŏnjin’guk in either title or body.\textsuperscript{21} From the Korean Integrated News Database System, I obtained 418 cases for the Dong-a Ilbo and 241 cases for the Hankyoreh.\textsuperscript{22} To make it manageable, I selected the cases on a biannual basis: for the Chosun, years 2001, 2003, 2005, and 2007, and for the Dong-a and the Hankyoreh, years 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, and 2008. This reduced the number of total cases to 469 (Chosun 138, Dong-a 219, and Hankyoreh 112).\textsuperscript{23} As some editorials in data used the term sŏnjin’guk more than once, the number of the term sŏnjin’guk used in 469 editorials was 607.

According to data, the number of editorials containing the term sŏnjin’guk is generally on the increase from 2000 to 2008 (Table 2). In the case of the Chosun, the increasing trend is distinct especially from 2004, and the annual number of cases is the highest in 2005 with 55, followed by 54 in 2007. In the case of the Dong-a, the number of cases peaks at 98 in 2008, followed by 93 in 2007. The Dong-a shows the strongest tendency of using the term sŏnjin’guk among the three newspapers. The Hankyoreh shows the weakest tendency of using the term, and its highest number of cases is 49 in 2007, followed by 48 in 2006. The annual number of cases shows a high degree of popularity of the term sŏnjin’guk.

\textsuperscript{21} In the Chosun Ilbo archive system, data for year 2008 was unavailable as of February 2009. Thus, I focused on the period of 2000-2007 for the analysis of the Chosun Ilbo.
\textsuperscript{22} It made 936 cases total for the three newspapers.
\textsuperscript{23} I excluded some cases that were wrongly assorted, and thus irrelevant to the term sŏnjin’guk. Originally, the total number of cases was 494 (the Chosun 154, the Dong-a 224, and the Hankyoreh 116).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Chosun</th>
<th>Dong-a</th>
<th>Hankyoreh</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>70</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
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<td>93</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>418</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>936</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Chosun Ilbo archive, KINDS

As for hujin’guk, I collected 56 cases of relevant editorial (21 cases for Chosun, 19 for Dong-a, and 16 for Hankyoreh), with the same methods as those for sŏnjin’guk. The number of the term hujin’guk used in 56 editorials was 66. Some of these cases were overlapped with those for sŏnjin’guk.

Based upon the Foucauldian notion of discourse as a system of relations among discursive elements, I conduct discourse analysis of newspaper texts. In analysis, I aim to figure out what relations are constructed around the central discursive concepts of sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk. In this regard, I look closely into what meanings, representations, and identities are constructed around those concepts and relations. I also investigate what roles those discursive elements and relations play and how they are utilized in contemporary Korean society.
This chapter is organized in five substantive sections. The first section investigates meanings constructed around the term sŏnjin’guk, along with its social roles and the various contexts in which it is used. The second section looks into meanings built around the term hujin’guk, together with its attributes and the contexts of its use. The third and fourth sections focus on the ways in which sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk, respectively, are represented in political, economic, social, and cultural aspects. And the last section discusses Koreans’ self national identities reflected in the discourse of sŏnjin’guk.

THE CONCEPT OF SŎNJIN’GU*K: MEANINGS, ROLES, AND CONTEXTS

The Meanings of Sŏnjin’guk

The term sŏnjin’guk literally means “ahead-going country,” with the syllables “sŏn,” “jin,” and “guk” denoting “ahead,” “go,” and “country” respectively. In a similar vein, the term hujin’guk means “behind-going country” with the syllable “hu” meaning “behind” or “backward.” The Standard Korean Dictionary (Pyojun kugŏ taesajŏn) defines sŏnjin’guk as “the country that is ahead in the development of politics, economy, culture, etc” (National Institute of the Korean Language 2008). In a historical sense, it is the year 1938 when the term sŏnjin’guk first appeared in Korean dictionary. Chosŏnŏ sajŏn [Korean Dictionary] written by Mun Se-Yeong (1938) defined sŏnjin’guk as “a country whose cultures and materials are developed ahead of a certain country.” At that
time, the term sŏnjin’guk was used interchangeably with the term munmyŏng-guk (civilized country), both of which virtually referred to the West, even though the term munmyŏng-guk was a far more dominant one under the global hegemony of the discourse of civilization. It was the post-colonial era, especially during the 1960s, when the concept of sŏnjin’guk replaced munmyŏng-guk as the dominant term referring to the West. This discursive transition reflected the global and national historical circumstances in which South Korea launched aggressive modernization project under U.S. hegemony in the Cold War context. With South Korea having incorporated into the Western hegemonic sphere, the national discursive change from munmyŏng-guk to sŏnjin’guk reflected the global hegemonic discursive transition from the discourse of civilization to that of development (Sachs 1992; Patterson 1997; Nederveen Pieterse 2001).

In the contemporary context, the concept of sŏnjin’guk is analytically distinguishable in two types according to the degree of concreteness: the concrete type and the abstract type. The concrete type of sŏnjin’guk refers to specific countries, international institutions, or international status groups. Sŏnjin’guk of the abstract type indicates the following: an abstract entity, a national goal, a national status, a certain (desirable) level, or a certain (desirable) type (Table 3).

In the editorial texts, total nineteen countries are explicitly designated as sŏnjin’guk in various contexts, such as: the U.S. (66 cases), Japan (33), Britain (10), Germany (9), France (7), South Korea (6), Australia (3), Sweden (3), Russia (2), Finland, Russia, Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium, Norway, Italy, Spain, Switzerland,
In terms of the international institution, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is most frequently referred to as the group of sŏnjin'guk (7 cases), and the Group of 7 and the Group of 8 are mentioned as the sŏnjin'guk group once respectively. The concrete type of the concept also includes international status groups classified in international treaties, which is usually termed as “developed country”: for instance, the Annex groups in the Kyoto Protocol.

However, the term sŏnjin'guk is more frequently used in highly abstract senses. First, it refers to an abstract entity, without explicitly designating specific countries or organizations (323 cases). In this case, sŏnjin'guk is assumed as a homogeneous group with various positive and exemplary attributes. For instance, an editorial of the Dong-a (25 March 2008) argues that:

_Sŏnjinhwa is far to go unless people could consume foods without concern. This is the reason why sŏnjin'guk strengthens regulations on food safety and the environment while executing deregulations to make the country good for business._

In this example, sŏnjin'guk is not specified, and exists as a highly abstract representation.

Second, it refers to a national goal, which South Korea should achieve in the near future (91 cases). The use of the term of this type tends to be combined with certain words related to achievement, such as “chinip” (entry), “toyak” (leap), “kkum” (dream), “hyanghada” (head for), “toeda” (become), and “naagada” (go forward). The

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24 Korea and Russia were not regarded as sŏnjin'guk in general terms: rather, they were referred to as sŏnjin'guk in certain areas such as information technology and soccer (Korea), and space technology (Russia).
*Hankyoreh* (12 January 2006), for instance, says that “these are problems to be solved on the way for a harmonious mature community and a true sŏnjin’guk.” In this case, sŏnjin’guk is not just an abstract entity, but a national goal that South Korea has to aim for. All of the cases in this concept considers Korea as the subject of pursuing sŏnjin’guk.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meanings</th>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>Contexts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| (Concrete Type) | • Point of direction  
• Standard of comparison  
• Desirable model  
• Reference case  
• Trend to follow  
• Preceding subject  
• Criterion of normality  
• Reference for national identity  
• Competitor | | • Criticizing domestic matters  
• Providing authority to certain arguments  
• Understanding international affairs  
• Presenting a national vision  
• Evaluating and promoting domestic events  
• Understanding domestic matters  
• Making a national identity  
• Criticizing international institutions |
| (Abstract Type) | • Concrete type  
• National status  
• Certain (desirable) level  
• Certain (desirable) type | | |

Third, it indicates a national status given to certain countries (42 cases). For instance, the Chosun (13 April 2005) argues that “this is the reason why the more a country is sŏnjin’guk, the more it gives weight on sports in the education curriculum [. . .].” The term sŏnjin’guk in this case is assumed as a national status in the discourse’s
hierarchical classificatory system. Although being considered as a desirable status, it does not take on strong directionality as is shown in the concept as a national goal.

And last, combined with such words as “sujun” (level) or “hyŏng” (type), it means a desirable condition, which South Korea should pursue in various areas (38 cases). In this case, sŏnjin’guk sujun (sŏnjin’guk-level) and sŏnjin’guk-hyŏng (sŏnjin’guk-type) refer to a high level and a desirable type respectively, which are assumed to appear in the countries of sŏnjin’guk.

The Roles of Sŏnjin’guk

Since its cultural and material expansions to the global range, the West has been identified as the most significant other to many non-Western societies. In this context, it has played a role as a positive referent for some, while as a negative referent for others in their modernization processes (Dittmer and Kim 1993). During the Cold War era, many countries in the “free” world regarded it as a positive referent under U.S. hegemony, which was culturally supported by the discourse of development or developmentalism. With its global hegemony, the West often played a role as an ideal model for the non-West to follow, and, in many cases, modernization and Westernization were considered as virtually the same. As for the specific roles of the West in global power relations, Hall (1996:186) notes that:

First, it allows us to characterize and classify societies into different categories – i.e. ‘western,’ ‘non-western.’ [. . .] Secondly, [. . .] It functions as part of a language, a ‘system of representation’ [. . .] for example, ‘western’ = urban = developed; or ‘non-western’ = non-industrial = rural = agricultural = under-developed. [. . .] Thirdly, it
provides a standard or model of comparison. [ . . . ] Fourthly, it provides criteria of evaluation against which other societies are ranked and around which powerful positive and negative feelings cluster [ . . . ].

These cultural roles of the West can be applied to South Korean developmental process, and are well reflected in the discourse of sŏnjin ’guk. The concept of sŏnjin ’guk takes on certain roles in various contexts, which somewhat parallel those of the West. I identify the following nine main roles: a point of direction (140 cases), a standard of comparison (99), a desirable model (77), a reference case (61), a trend to follow (54), a preceding subject (38), a criterion of normality (27), a reference for national identity (26), and a competitor (14 cases) (Table 3).

First, it plays a role in suggesting a direction for the country to go in various areas. With regard to this, the Chosun (22 August 2007) argues that “Korea should go forward to become sŏnjin ’guk, a leading part of the world [ . . . .]” In this example, the concept refers to a national goal, and, at the same time, plays a role in providing a point of direction for the country. This role is not assumed only by the concept of sŏnjin ’guk as a national goal. When mentioned in such phrases as “sŏnjin ’guk sujun” or “sŏnjin ’guk-hyŏng,” it can also suggest a point of direction which the country should pursue.

Second, it provides a standard of comparison. In judging or evaluating certain aspects of Korean society, the newspapers tend to compare it with sŏnjin ’guk. For instance, the Chosun (16 November 2007) mentions that “our country’s percentage of health insurance coverage [ . . . ] is short of sŏnjin ’guk’s 70~80 percent.” In this case, sŏnjin ’guk is used conceptually as an abstract entity without specific societies or
countries designated, and plays a role in providing a standard by which Korean health insurance policy is evaluated, regardless of the circumstantial differences between countries.

Third, it assumes a role in suggesting a desirable model. In this regard, the *Hankyoreh* (1 May 2008) argues that:

> It is the teacher that decides the success and failure of school education. The secret of the success of Finland, which is regarded as the best sŏnjin’guk of education, lies in its policies on teachers. The Finnish government employs only those who have a master’s degree or beyond as teachers, and gives them a level of treatment similar to that for doctors and lawyers.

In this case, sŏnjin’guk is specified as Finland, and plays a role in providing a desirable educational model for Korean society.

Fourth, it is used for a reference case. This is somewhat parallel to the role of a desirable model, but does not take on strong desirability. With regard to the Amnesty International’s criticism of the Korean government’s suppression of civil demonstrations, the *Dong-a* (21 July 2008) disputes that the Amnesty International “does not seem to know how the police in sŏnjin’guk, such as the U.S. and Japan, treat demonstrators [. . .].” In this case, a legal custom in sŏnjin’guk provides a point of reference for South Korean society, but is not necessarily regarded as desirable.

Fifth, it assumes a trend to follow. The editorials argue that there are trends that sŏnjin’guk adopts with certain issues, e.g., neoliberal policies in the context of globalization. This is often assumed as “world trends,” which Korea should follow in order not to become a straggler of the world.
Sixth, it assumes a role in showing a preceding subject in various areas, such as technology, economic development, welfare, and so forth. The Dong-a (9 December 2008), for instance, argues that:

Our country’s export has passed $400 billion this year, which is the 11th in the world. Having reached $0.1 billion in 1964, it has grown over 4,000 times in 44 years. It took 13 years for the export amount to reach $400 billion from $100 billion (FY 1995), which is more than 4 year short of the average period taken by sŏnjin ’guk (17.2 years), which stepped the height of $400 billion ahead of us.

Echoing modernization theory, this editorial implies that sŏnjin ’guk has already passed a point on a universal path of economic growth, where South Korea is currently on.

Seventh, it takes a role providing a criterion of normality and common sense. With regard to this, it is assumed that social systems and policies of sŏnjin ’guk are basically normal and commonsensical, against which other societies’ degree of “normality” or “abnormality” can be assessed and evaluated.

Eighth, it is used as a reference for national identity. In this regard, many editorials identify South Korea as a country pursuing sŏnjin ’guk with the current status of “almost sŏnjin ’guk.” And last, it plays a role as a competitor with which Korea has to compete in various fields, such as economy, technology, and trade.

The Contexts of the Use of Sŏnjin ’guk

As a positive referent for South Korean society, the concept of sŏnjin ’guk is used in a variety of contexts: criticizing domestic matters (224 cases); providing authority to certain arguments (224 cases); understanding international affairs (60 cases); presenting
a national vision (32 cases); evaluating and promoting domestic events (28 cases); understanding domestic matters (20 cases); making a national identity (11 cases); and criticizing certain countries or international institutions (8 cases) (Table 3). The contexts of its use are closely related to what sŏnjin’guk means and what role it takes.

First of all, it is very frequently used in the context of criticizing South Korean society. In the hierarchical scheme of the discourse, South Korean society is positioned just below the full-fledged sŏnjin’guk, incurring a process of self-orientalization. In the process of continuous comparison of their country with sŏnjin’guk, Koreans psychologically undergo a certain degree of “inferiority complex” and “double consciousness” (Fanon 1967; Du Bois 1994). In this context, many editorials make harsh criticisms on South Korean society, relying on the idealized images of sŏnjin’guk.

Second, it is also frequently used in making arguments or opinions. When justification or authority is needed for certain arguments, the newspapers tend to lean on the ideal image of sŏnjin’guk, saying, for instance, that “it is a common thing in sŏnjin’guk.” As an assumed bearer of authentic modernity, sŏnjin’guk makes a good source of authority for South Koreans.

Third, it is employed in the context of understanding international affairs. This is mostly related to the distinction in national statuses in international negotiations or treaties. As for international climate change meetings, for instance, Annex countries are typically expressed as sŏnjin’guk vis-à-vis “developing countries.”

Fourth, as a central concept of the discourse supporting South Korea’s modernization process, sŏnjin’guk is utilized in suggesting a national vision. The
concept of sŏnjin’guk is referred to in the context of suggesting what South Korea should pursue and where it should go. This context is especially relevant to the concept of sŏnjin’guk as a national goal and its role as a point of direction, which suggest a direction of the transformation of Korean society.

Fifth, it is also used in the context of evaluating and promoting certain policies, events, or phenomena appearing in Korea. As noted above, sŏnjin’guk plays a role as a yardstick to measure the performance of Korean society. In this context, the newspapers tend to ahistorically compare Korean domestic matters to those of some countries that are typically referred to as sŏnjin’guk in order to encourage them. When a certain event in Korea is considered as common in sŏnjin’guk, it gets a great authority. This is closely related to the sixth frequent context of the use of sŏnjin’guk, which is to understand domestic affairs. In this case, the domestic affairs are not necessarily encouraged, but sŏnjin’guk provides a reference case to “properly” understand the nature of affairs.

Seventh, it is also drawn on to construct national identity, which is very relevant to the role of sŏnjin’guk as a reference for identity. Through the continuous comparison with sŏnjin’guk, the newspapers tend to identify South Korea as a country pursuing the status of sŏnjin’guk. And last, it is used in the context of criticizing foreign countries or organizations. In this case, sŏnjin’guk becomes a universal referent against which their policies, systems, and practices are evaluated.
THE CONCEPT OF HUJIN’GUK: MEANINGS, ATTRIBUTES, AND CONTEXTS

As the non-West is a constituent part of the construction of the West, so is hujin’guk to the creation of sŏnjin’guk. In the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, hujin’guk plays a role as the constituent “other” into which South Koreans’ negative values are projected. Some Korean theorists call this process as “pokje Orientalism” (copied Orientalism), which resembles the epistemic hierarchy between the “West and the Rest” in Western Orientalism (Lee 2002). In this regard, Lee (2002), an expert on Indian history, points out that South Koreans have constructed their own “Orient” reflecting Western Orientalism and perceive other non-Western countries, such as India, through this Orientalist framework. Even South Korea as a non-Western country is not free from this Korean version of Orientalist gaze, as is reflected in their self-criticizing attitudes.

As with sŏnjin’guk, the concept of hujin’guk can be identified in two types: the concrete type and the abstract type (Table 4). For the concrete type, certain countries are designated as hujin’guk, such as: South Korea (23 cases), Bangladesh (2 cases), China, Southeast Asia, Guatemala, Surinam, and Ireland in the past (1 case each). Those designated as hujin’guk are economically poor countries in general by certain economic criteria, such as GDP per capita. It is interesting to note that South Korea is most frequently designated as hujin’guk. In a contextual reading, however, this should be understood as reflecting a sarcastic attitude of self-criticism on certain aspects of Korean society. In this context, Korea is referred to as a certain type of hujin’guk, rather than “overall hujin’guk,” such as a hujin’guk of human right, traffic, politics, disaster
prevention system, or aviation policy in certain contexts. To designate Korea as *hujin’guk* is a strong value-charged attitude signifying that those negative aspects should not belong to Korea, a country of “near *sŏnjin’guk*.”

Table 4. The Concept of *Hujin’guk*: Meanings, Attributes, and the Contexts of Its Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meanings</th>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Contexts</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Concrete Type)</td>
<td>Anti-human right</td>
<td>Criticizing domestic situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Specific country</td>
<td>Backwardness</td>
<td>Arguing for certain policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• International</td>
<td>Unhygienic condition</td>
<td>Understanding international affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>status group</td>
<td>High risk and insensibility to safety</td>
<td>Criticizing foreign countries and situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Abstract Type)</td>
<td>Incapacity and irresponsibility</td>
<td>Evaluating domestic events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Abstract entity</td>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>Understanding domestic matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• National status</td>
<td>Anti-trend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Certain</td>
<td>Disorder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(undesirable)</td>
<td>Fault and error</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>type</td>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Certain</td>
<td>Lack of principle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(undesirable)</td>
<td>Short-sightedness</td>
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<td>level</td>
<td>Nonsense</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inefficiency</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In terms of the abstract type, many editorials refer to *hujin’guk* as an abstract entity, without designating any specific country or group, which therefore exists as an abstract form of representation (14 cases). In a somewhat similar vein to the concept of *sŏnjin’guk*, the concept of *hujin’guk* also refers to “*hujin’guk-hyŏng*” (*hujin’guk*-type) (19 cases), a national status (2), or “*hujin’guk sujun*” (*hujin’guk* level) (1 case).
Various negative attributes of society are associated with the concept of *hujin’guk* such as: anti-human right; backwardness; unhygienic conditions (8 cases each); risk and insensibility to safety (7 cases); incapacity and irresponsibility (7); corruption (4); low women’s status (4); confusion (3); conflict; anti-trend; disorder; fault; poverty (2 cases each); lack of principle; short-sightedness; nonsense; and inefficiency (1 case each).

The contexts in which the term *hujin’guk* are used are also parallel to those for *sŏnjin’guk*, regardless of the differences in substantial contents between the two, such as: criticizing domestic situations (43 cases); arguing for certain policies (13); understanding international affairs (3); criticizing foreign countries and situations (3 cases); evaluating domestic events; understanding domestic matters (2 cases each). In these cases, *hujin’guk* is mostly used as a negative referent that South Korea should not resemble.

**THE REPRESENTATION OF SŎNJIN’GUK**

In Eurocentric discourses, the West is constructed in a way various positive values are attributed to it. In this sense, it is rather a culturally constructed “set of images” than an empirically grounded entity (Hall 1996). Furthermore, the positive values are often supposed as derived from “exceptional” Western history, which is disconnected from the history of the rest of the world. This kind of “disconnected” Eurocentric “tunnel”
historiography naturalizes an essentialistic interpretation of the universal and superior West (Blaut 1993; Subrahmanyam 1997; Washbrook 1997).

Those Eurocentric aspects are well reflected in ways sŏnjin’guk is represented in the discourse of sŏnjin’guk. Being constructed as an advanced, normal, and mature being, sŏnjin’guk appears as a perfect society to South Koreans, which presumably has all that they aspire to attain in their development process. With regard to politics, many editorials imply that the status of sŏnjin’guk is the natural outcome of the desirable political system. Sŏnjin’guk politics is generally assumed as normal, mature, stable, and transparent. For instance, under the title “it needs to make a device to reduce the harm of polifessor [political professor],” the Dong-a (9 April 2008) argues that “it is a common sense in sŏnjin’guk that a professor resigns his (her) professorship to become an elected public official.” Whether it is true or not, a supposed political practice of sŏnjin’guk in this editorial is naturalized as “common sense.” As the concept of sŏnjin’guk is used in an abstract form, yet, we cannot know in which countries this political practice is “common sense.”

On the other hand, a seemingly wrong practice is excused when it is considered as a practice common in sŏnjin’guk. In this regard, an editorial of the Chosun (22 January 2003) writes that:

Of course, it is a common phenomenon in sŏnjin’guk too for the ruling group to reward its members by political appointments of public positions. However, the reason why the “nakasan appointment” [from-the-top appointment] makes a problem especially in our society is that the appointment is not just limited to governmental institutions [. . .].
As far as “nakasan appointment” is considered as common in sŏnjin ‘guk, it is excused as an acceptable political phenomenon. Yet, the problem is, the editorial argues, that Korea’s “nakasan appointment” is excessive while that of sŏnjin ‘guk is moderate.

It is argued that the normality of sŏnjin ‘guk politics is closely related to efficiency, especially in its support of the economy. An editorial of the Dong-a (25 September 2006), for instance, states that “the political circles in sŏnjin ‘guk rarely call a business person as a witness unless s/he is involved in a big scandal, because it risks shrinking the business administration.” The newspaper expresses its position against the National Assembly’s summons of businessmen, relying on the authority of sŏnjin ‘guk. Sŏnjin ‘guk politics is also considered far from corruption, and its fair and transparent political system is often supposed as based upon stable and well-managed legal systems. This is related to an assumption that sŏnjin ‘guk is generally under the leadership of the mature and responsible ruling classes.

In terms of the economy, sŏnjin ‘guk is generally described as having a high level of income, advanced technology, and a big and competitive economy. With regard to this, an editorial of the Chosun (22 February 2007) argues that “in today’s world, a country which has a lot of competitive global corporations is sŏnjin ‘guk, and hujin ‘guk otherwise.” It is said that the sŏnjin ‘guk economy exceeds that of non-sŏnjin ‘guk not merely in scale, but in technology as well. The sŏnjin ‘guk economy is also regarded as “being advanced.” Implying a kind of linear path of economic growth, an editorial of the Dong-a (28 January 2008) argues that “[Korea’s] per capita income has barely passed $20,000 last year, with $20,081. It has taken 12 years, which is a few years more
than sŏnjin'guk, to reach it [. . .].” In this perception, Korea has just passed the point where sŏnjin'guk, which is used here in an abstract form, went by in the past. In a similar vein, another editorial argues that:

Our country’s export has passed $400 billion this year, which is the 11th in the world. Having reached $0.1 billion in 1964, it has grown over 4,000 times in 44 years. It took 13 years for the export amount to reach $400 billion from $100 billion (FY 1995), which is more than 4 year short of the average period taken by sŏnjin’guk (17.2 years), which stepped the height of $400 billion ahead of us. (Dong-a December 9, 2008)

The sŏnjin’guk economy is generally assumed as based upon rational and transparent decision-making processes. It is considered that transparency and freedom from corruption are secrets for the strong and competitive sŏnjin’guk economy. As sŏnjin’guk’s wealth is assumed mainly as a result of their efficient, rational, and transparent economic (and political) systems, sŏnjin’guk is conceived of as respectful country. In this way, to become sŏnjin’guk is not just a matter of raising national income, but should accompany the establishment of honest economic system. With regard to this, the Chosun (3 September 2003) argues that:

According to the Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index, South Korea has been ranked at the bottom among the OECD countries for years. It is impossible for an economy, in which corporations survive by corrupt money instead of ability, to have competitiveness to get into sŏnjin’guk. Even if it succeeds in forcibly raising GNP, others would not recognize it as sŏnjin’guk.

This editorial implies that sŏnjin’guk is a transparent respectful country, whose economic competitiveness is based upon competence rather than corruption. In this way,
the process of becoming sŏnjin’guk is supposed as quite rational, transparent, and respectful.25

The Chosun and the Dong-a use the concept of sŏnjin’guk in their support of the principle of liberal market economy, asserting that there is no sŏnjin’guk that is not based upon this principle. The newspapers’ promulgation of market ideology represents their conservative voices in the South Korean political context, which also values the principle of “liberal democracy.” Under the title “we will defend liberty and the market,” the Dong-a (1 April 2006) argues that “one cannot be sŏnjin’guk with an anti-market ideology.”27 Reflecting the Korean conservatives’ disposition to go in tandem with neoliberal globalization, the image of sŏnjin’guk is often associated with neoliberalism. Under the title of “2006 sŏnjin’guk trend,” the Dong-a (26 December 2006) argues that some keywords are found in the trends of sŏnjin’guk policies, such as downsizing of government, privatization of public enterprise, deregulation, pro-business policy, and the open market. It adds that the trends are summarized in a phrase of “small government, big market.”26

25 This perspective does not take into account that the processes of capitalist economic development have historically accompanied unprecedented levels of violence, destructions, and “irrational” activities around the globe (Hobsbawm 1962; Hobson 1965; McNeill 1982; Blaut 1993; Cowen and Shenton 1996; Rist 1997). Disputing Britain’s technological superiority as a secret for its Industrial Revolution, Hobsbawm (1962:53), for instance, argues that “British industry [in the early nineteenth century] had established a monopoly by means of war, other people’s revolutions, and her own imperial rule.” This historical explanation of the secret of global economic inequality is still supported today by theorists focusing on external and structural factors in understanding capitalist economic development, e.g., the asymmetric power relations among countries within the exploitative world capitalist system (Frank 1989; Wallerstein 2004).

26 In contrast, the Hankyoreh (1 December 2008), reflecting its progressive and anti-neoliberal position, argues that “it is a trend in sŏnjin’guk to increase tax for the wealthy and support the weak class in order to stimulate the economy and to make social harmony [. . .].” Despite the difference in perspectives on neoliberal globalization between the conservative and progressive newspapers, they share in common the tendency of relying on the authority of sŏnjin’guk for their arguments.
In terms of the social, sŏnjin’guk is generally represented as a mature society, which has well-established law systems, efficient disaster prevention systems, civility, transparent decision-making processes, high awareness of human right, tolerance toward differences, and so on. The Chosun (16 October 2003) argues that the “world media,” which virtually refer to the Western media, consider “the degree of respect for laws and systems as the most important thing to distinguish between sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk.” Another editorial’s criticism of China reflects the image of the sŏnjin’guk society very well:

It is not a first-class nation just because it has the largest amount of U.S. dollar and launches satellites into the air. When it is the situation in which a foreigner goes to the [Chinese] hospital, risking his (her) life, who would respect China as a leading country of the world? [. . .] Regardless of its size, [China] would not be regarded as sŏnjin’guk if it does not have the national consciousness of valuing human life and frankness, and a social system that punishes dishonesty and the evasion of the law. (Chosun, 22 August 2007)

This editorial argues that China is not sŏnjin’guk because of its lack of frankness, disregard for human life, and unjust social system, which conversely implies that the sŏnjin’guk society has frank, human-valuing, and fair and just social system. Furthermore, it also implies that sŏnjin’guk is a country that is respected in the world. In this regard, another editorial of the Chosun (26 February 2007) mentions that “sŏnjin’guk is not one which has a lot of money, large territory, or large population” and that “sŏnjin’guk is one that is respected in the international system.” As such,
sonjin’guk’s economic power does not just mean material richness, but is well associated with its cultural authority.27

The sonjin’guk society is supposed as mature, harmonious, and very generous to the weak. People in sonjin’guk are portrayed as behaving responsibly according to their social roles. This is assumed as closely related to the leading role of the ruling classes, which are described as moral, generous, and responsible. With regard to this, an editorial of the Chosun (2 May 2007) argues that:

The power supporting the sonjin’guk society is said to be “noblesse oblige.” [. . .] The number of fallen soldiers from Eton College, which the children of English high class attended, was over 2,000 during World War I and II. It was some times the rate of casualties of those from the working class. World super-rich Warren Buffett donated $37.4 billion, 85 percent of his total wealth. [. . .] The accumulation of these incidents makes a solid base for their societies, and gives justification to wealth and power accumulated by one’s own efforts, and creates a social eye to distinguish discrimination from distinction [. . .].

In relation to this, inclusiveness toward foreigners and alienated people is regarded as a prerequisite for becoming sonjin’guk. An editorial of the Dong-a (4 October 2008) argues for the embracement of immigrants and foreign laborers, saying that “no matter how per capita income is high, we cannot be a true mummyông-guk, an

27 With regard to this, it is interesting to note that the recently highlighted phenomenon of the “rise of China” is not reflected in the discourse of sonjin’guk. Despite China’s (re)emergence on the global stage and its recently achieved status as the biggest trading partner to South Korea, its cultural power does not yet reflect its material power in the dominant Korean discourse.
upright sŏnjin’guk without embracing these people.”28 The assumption of inclusiveness is also applied to other weak social groups such as the disabled, children, women, etc.

Safety awareness is also frequently attributed to sŏnjin’guk. An editorial of the Dong-a (3 September 2002) criticizes the disaster prevention system of Korea, saying that “it would be an actual sŏnjin’guk when it maintains a firm infrastructure that is safe against any typhoon stronger than ‘Sarah’ and ‘Rusa’ [. . .].” In a similar vein, an editorial of the Chosun (2 August 2001) disapproves of South Korean flood prevention measures, arguing that “even if [Korea] boasts its membership of the OECD, the sŏnjin’guk club, we cannot help but have a doubt if it is better than countries like Bangladesh, which suffer hundred-thousands of casualties for a flood.” It is interesting to note that Bangladesh, which is frequently referred to as hujin’guk, is considered as the example of an undesirable country in this editorial. Regarding the traffic safety issue, an editorial of the Dong-a (12 May 2000) argues that “sŏnjin’guk has long been prohibiting the use of cell phone while driving.”29 As such, many of the attributes associated with sŏnjin’guk are, in fact, Koreans’ own constructions, rather than faithful reflections of reality “out there.”

Sŏnjin’guk, in the cultural area, is represented as having advanced, high-quality, and attractive cultural properties. These properties broadly range from national brand and scientific knowledge to the ability of enjoying high culture. This perception makes

28 It is interesting to note that the term munmyŏng-guk (civilized country), which is a central element of the discourse of civilization and rarely used in the contemporary era, is employed here as an equivalence to the term sŏnjin’guk.

29 In fact, many states of the U.S., which is most frequently referred to as sŏnjin’guk, do not prohibit using cell phone in driving. This example shows that a good amount of “idealized” information about sŏnjin’guk is ungrounded.
a ground for the cultural hegemony of sŏnjin‘guk, and gives justification to the pro-Western conservatives’ argument for opening Korea’s cultural fields to the outside, such as education. As for sŏnjin‘guk’s national image, an editorial of the Dong-a (15 November 2008) argues that:

“The prices of the same products of the U.S. and Germany are $150, while Korea’s is just $100.” [. . .] The reason why there is a big $50 difference is that we are weaker than sŏnjin‘guk in the “national brand value,” [. . .] If a country’s national brand value is low, not only are the prices of the products and services of that country low, but are the people of that country treated as “inferior people.” Korea’s low national brand value is mainly due to the negative images of illegal strikes, violent demonstrations, North Korea’s nuclear issue, and North Korea’s strange behaviors, but is also due to the insufficient overseas information activities. President Lee announced in his inaugural address that “we will raise the national brand value to the sŏnjin‘guk level in my presidential term.”

Blaming laborers’ strikes and demonstrations for Korea’s low brand value, this editorial shows the newspaper’s anti-labor conservative ideology. And, it also expresses a confrontational conservative attitude in terms of the relationship with North Korea by linking “North Korea’s strange behaviors” to South Korea’s national image. The conservative newspapers tend to emphasize the importance of international events in enhancing national image. With regard to this, an editorial of the Chosun (28 November 2007) argues for taking advantage of the 2012 Yeosu Expo as a ground to upgrade Korea’s national brand, saying that “Japan started to be regarded as sŏnjin‘guk, getting out of the yoke of defeated nation, by hosting the Osaka Expo in 1970.”
THE REPRESENTATION OF HUJIN’GUK

As the constitutive other for sŏnjin’guk, hujin’guk is generally represented as opposite to it, that is, a lacking entity with various negative attributes. The negative aspects of hujin’guk are not limited to certain areas, but appear broadly in such fields as political, economic, social, and cultural ones. In this way, it is constructed as a national embodiment of undesirability in general terms. In the political area, hujin’guk is portrayed as afflicted with “confusing,” “unpredictable,” “corrupt,” “inefficient,” “irresponsible,” and “incapable” political systems and situations. Negatively perceived aspects of South Korean political practices are well associated with the attributes of hujin’guk. For a South Korea’s presidential election problem, for instance, the Chosun (30 October 2007) argues that:

In 2002 presidential election, the candidate of the ruling party was decided 24 days before the election. [. . .] It seems that the same situation is happening in this election. The things that would belong to the Third World hujin’guk have been repeating in each election.

Without specifying certain countries, this editorial compares a seemingly confusing aspect of Korean politics to the negative image of hujin’guk.

Hujin’guk politics is also well related to short-sightedness and ignorance. Criticizing the Korean National Assembly’s way of dealing with the Free Trade Agreement with the U.S., an editorial of the Dong-a (9 May 2008) designates Korea as a “hujin’guk of politics,” deploring that South Korean politics’ “short-sightedness and
ignorance are surprising and pitiful.” Some editorials construct the corrupt image of hujin’guk politics. Denouncing a political scandal in South Korea, another editorial of the Dong-a (2 December 2008) argues that “seeing again the summons of the ex- and incumbent presidents’ son and relatives by the prosecution [. . .], we feel uneasy to think until when this kind of hujin’guk-style corruption should be repeated.”  

When the politics of hujin’guk is described as such, it may be hard to imagine any goodness from hujin’guk in other fields. The characteristics of the hujin’guk economy are also assumed in opposition to those of the sŏnjin’guk economy. The hujin’guk economy is generally represented as noncompetitive, backward, and unreliable. In this regard, the Chosun (22 February 2007) defines hujin’guk as a country that does not have many competitive global corporations. Thus, the hujin’guk economy is well expected to lag behind global competition and trends. It is often assumed that South Korea could roll back to the status of hujin’guk if it does not overcome its economic problems.

Hujin’guk’s social area tends to be associated with the images of disorder, dangerousness, irresponsibility, incapacity, nonsense, and unsanitary conditions. People in hujin’guk are also portrayed as disorderly and irresponsible in the social arena. In this regard, an editorial of the Chosun (7 August 2001) argues that:

The whole land of Korea is a dumping ground. [. . .] The solutions are the education for order and manner to get them to be ingrained into individuals from their early ages, and

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30 The Hankyoreh (5 March 2002) notes that corruption is not specific to hujin’guk. It argues that “everyone knows that a lot of money is put into politics and that there is a room for corruption in that process. This is not the case just for Korea, but, broadly exists in sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk [. . .].”
the strict regulations on the scene of disorder. [. . .] Or, we will not get out of “spiritual hujin’guk” regardless of the income level.

As for the issue of safety, hujin’guk is regarded as incapable of preventing natural or man-made disasters. Thus, it is generally considered as being exposed to various kinds of dangers. As for an explosive accident blamed for forty lives in Korea, an editorial of the Dong-a (9 January 2008) argues that it is a “tragedy of the hujin’guk of safety awareness and prevention system.” Hujin’guk is also represented as weak in keeping human right. A “progressive” voice, the Hankyoreh in particular tend to problematize Korea’s human right issues in relation to the concept of hujin’guk. This newspaper frequently designates South Korea as a hujin’guk of human right. In this perception, sŏnjin’guk monopolizes the concept of human right.

Hujin’guk represents nonsensical situation. As for a situation unexpected in common sense, some South Korean internet users reportedly called it as “a piece of ridiculous hujin’guk-style comedy” (Hankyoreh, 25 March 2004). It is interesting to see that a hierarchy appears even among diseases: there are “sŏnjin’guk-type” and “hujin’guk-type” diseases. For instance, the Chosun (8 January 2001; 17 December 2001) designates certain epidemics as “hujin’guk-type,” such as dysentery, cholera, malaria, and the measles. South Koreans tend to take the occurrence of those “hujin’guk-type” diseases more frustrating and humiliating.

In the field of knowledge, hujin’guk is regarded as backward, especially in mathematics and science. According to the Chosun (24 February 2007), mathematics and science are regarded as “world common sense,” and backwardness in them is
considered as “not knowing world common sense.” Emphasizing the importance of those disciplines, it argues that South Korea should not be “rolling back to the ignorance of hujin’guk.” The field of knowledge is also monopolized by sŏnjin’guk, whereby different forms of knowledge, i.e. indigenous ones, are ignored.

Cultural infrastructure of hujin’guk is also perceived as backward, poor, and dangerous. As for this, an editorial of the Dong-a (30 July 2002) writes that:

There is a report that public libraries are in danger of collapsing because of the unbearable weight increase of books. […] The ungainly appearance of propping up the library with steel poles as a temporary measure symbolically demonstrates the appearance of cultural hujin’guk.”

SELF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE DISCOURSE OF SŎNJIN’GUk

In the hierarchical framework of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, South Korea’s self national identity is underlain by both a sense of superiority over hujin’guk and a feeling of lack over sŏnjin’guk. This is related to a perception that South Korea has rapidly progressed from hujin’guk to almost sŏnjin’guk today on a supposedly universal path of development. In this respect, hujin’guk tends to be regarded as the past of Korea and sŏnjin’guk its future.

Echoing modernization theory’s distinction between the modern (or the developed) and the tradition (or the underdeveloped), early South Korean modernizers in the development era did not hesitate to designate their country’s status as hujin’guk.
On this designation, the country’s poverty, backward economy, and traditional ways of life were problematized, providing the South Korean developmental regime with legitimacy for its aggressive modernization project. Korean modernizers accepted the hierarchical categorization of underdeveloped *hujin’guk* and developed *sŏnjin’guk* as somewhat objective and universal, without paying much attention to their political implications related to U.S. global hegemony (Latham 2000; Nederveen Pieterse 2001).

It is during the 1970s that South Korean modernizers began to perceive their country as having escaped from the status of *hujin’guk*. When it came to the late 1970s, in particular, they began to designate their country as located in the top-tier of *chungjin’guk* (the developing country between *sŏnjin’guk* and *hujin’guk*), which was close to the rank of *sŏnjin’guk*.

South Korea is now frequently identified as nearly *sŏnjin’guk*, as is conveyed in such a phrase as “*sŏnjin’guk munt’ŏk*” (on the threshold of *sŏnjin’guk*). With regard to this, Koreans feel a sense of pride in their achievement of the status of “almost *sŏnjin’guk*” in such a short period of modernization, which is assumed as having taken hundreds of years by the West. Conservative voices argue that this is due to the previous generations’ blood, sweat, and tears, and that it is our generations’ responsibility to make Korea a full-fledged *sŏnjin’guk*. Grounded upon its perception of the world characterized by limitless competition, the *Chosun* (20 November 2005) argues that South Korea currently has two contrasting options: “to aggressively participate in the limitless competition system or to join in the group of grumblers falling behind the competition.” The *Chosun* and *Dong-a* frequently identify the status
of South Korea as “on the threshold of the sonjin’guk group” and as the “mediator between sonjin’guk and developing countries” (Dong-a, 15 November 2008; 17 November 2008).

The conservative newspapers’ identification of the country, however, is not uncontested. With regard to this, it is interesting to see the Chosun’s criticism of a former chief-presidential secretary on his argument that “South Korea is already sonjin’guk.” According to the Chosun (26 November 2005), he addressed that “South Korea is sonjin’guk because there is no evidence that it is not.” Criticizing conventional ideas, he reportedly stated that “to make arguments such as ‘we have to enter into the group of sonjin’guk’ or ‘we are on a forked road between sonjin’guk or non-sonjin’guk’ is evidence that we are living under the conventional practices and ideas that are forcefully injected [into us] for decades.” In response to this, the Chosun (26 November 2005) argued that an important criterion for judging sonjin’guk was per capita income of $20,000, and that the number of countries above this level was thirty five. Thus, according to the Chosun, it was nonsense to argue that the country whose per capita income rank was the 48th (South Korea) was sonjin’guk.

This kind of debates demonstrates the ambiguity and subjectivity of the concept of sonjin’guk, which are related to different political implications. For instance, a Dong-a’s editorial (15 August 2008) suggests $30,000 as a criterion for sonjin’guk. The currently dominant idea seems to be the criterion of $30,000, which is $10,000 higher
than the criterion of just a few years ago.\textsuperscript{31} It seems that the conservative newspapers
tend to create a further goal of sŏnjin’guk for the country being close to achieving its
previous goal. Historically, Presidents Park Chung-Hee in the late 1970s and Chun
Doo-Hwan in the 1980s frequently mentioned that South Korea was approaching
sŏnjin’guk and the goal of sŏnjin’guk was “just over there.” National identities
promoted by them are somewhat similar to that of today’s “sŏnjin’guk munt’ôk.” In this
sense, South Korea has now been on the threshold of the group of sŏnjin’guk for more
than thirty years, serving for mobilizing national energy for certain directions.

It is argued that South Korea’s contemporary status, near sŏnjin’guk, has not
been easily achieved. Rather, it is considered as a status to which “the ex-generations
have climbed up, getting bloody bruises on their knees” (Chosun, 1 July 2005). It is
perceived that South Korea is now chasing sŏnjin’guk and being pursued by
“developing” countries. In this circumstance, the national strategy for “moving forward,”
rather than “rolling back,” is vital, about which the Dong-a (22 October 2008) argues
that Korea is “on a forked road to the progress or to the retreat of ‘national rank.’”

\textsuperscript{31} It is interesting to note that the economic criterion for sŏnjin’guk is far higher than international criteria
of “high-income” countries. The World Bank, for instance, has set $12,196 of Gross National Income per
capita as a criterion for “high-income” countries in 2009 (World Bank 2010a). Furthermore, South Korea
is now generally regarded as an “advanced” country in international developmental terms, as it is a
member country of “advanced economies” (IMF), “very high human development” group (Human
Development Index), Development Assistance Committee and the “high-income” group (OECD), etc. On
the other hand, some international institutions recognize the ambiguity of the concepts of the “developing”
and the “developed,” and do not use the clear-cut distinction between the two. For instance, the United
Nations Statistics Division (2008) acknowledges that “[t]here is no established convention for the
designation of ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ countries or areas in the United Nations system.” The World
Trade Organization (2009) also states that “[t]here are no WTO definitions of “developed” and
“developing” countries.” The WTO allows certain countries to declare their status as “developing country”
for their own advantages in negotiation.
CONCLUSION

Focusing on basic concepts and characteristics of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, this chapter has argued that it imagines a world characterized by a distinction between sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk, in which the former assumes the latter as its alienated other. Through the analysis of newspapers, this chapter has found that the concept of sŏnjin’guk is mainly used with various connotations in which certain countries or group of countries are specified or not. The countries conventionally included in the concept of the “West,” such as the U.S. and Western European countries, along with Japan, are typically referred to sŏnjin’guk. However, reflecting South Koreans’ values on desirable society, the concept of sŏnjin’guk is used more frequently in an abstract type. In this case, the concept represents abstract entity, national goal, national status, certain desirable level, and certain desirable type. The concept of sŏnjin’guk plays various roles in the country by suggesting various things such as: point of direction; standard of comparison; desirable model; reference case; trend to follow; preceding subject; criterion of normality; reference for national identity; and competitor. It is also used in various contexts reflecting South Koreans’ understanding of their country and the world: such as criticizing domestic matters; providing authority to certain arguments; understanding international affairs; presenting a national vision; evaluating and promoting domestic events; understanding domestic matters; constructing national identity; and criticizing international institutions. In this way, the concept of sŏnjin’guk plays an important role in directing the transformation of the South Korean society.
This chapter has examined that the concept of *hujin'guk* constitutes the discourse of *sŏnjin'guk* by providing a relationally alienated entity to the concept of *sŏnjin'guk*. Containing South Korea’s negative values about society within itself, the concept of *hujin’guk* is represented with various unfavorable attributes, such as: anti-human right; backwardness; unhygienic condition; insensibility to safety; incapacity and irresponsibility; corruption; low women’s status; confusion; conflict; anti-trend; disorder; fault and error; poverty; lack of principle; short-sightedness; nonsense; and inefficiency. As a representation that South Korean society should not resemble, it is used in various contexts such as: criticizing domestic situations; arguing for certain policies; understanding international affairs; criticizing foreign countries and situations; evaluating domestic incidents; and understanding domestic matters.

This chapter has also found that South Korea identifies itself as “near *sŏnjin'guk,*” or “*sŏnjin'guk munt'ŏk*” (on the threshold of *sŏnjin'guk*) in the hierarchical classificatory system of the discourse. Interpreting South Korea’s economic development as an escape from the status of *hujin'guk*, the discourse assumes *hujin'guk* as the past of the country and *sŏnjin'guk* as its future. In this respect, South Koreans’ mainstream national identity is based upon a feeling of superiority over *hujin'guk* and a sense of lack over *sŏnjin'guk*. By arguing that the country’s vertical mobility from *hujin'guk* to the contemporary status of “near *sŏnjin'guk*” is based upon the past generations’ hard efforts, the conservative newspapers put a responsibility on the contemporary generations to achieve full-fledged *sŏnjin'guk* in the near future. In this
regard, they try to mobilize people in the direction of social transformation that they imagine, by utilizing the discourse of sŏnjin ’guk.

This chapter has argued that the basic concepts and assumptions of the discourse of sŏnjin ’guk are Eurocentric. Given that countries frequently referred to as sŏnjin ’guk are mostly Western countries, the discourse tends to homogenize and idealize them regardless of reality. In this idealizing process, the discourse does not pay much attention to the diversity of world societies, each of which is rooted in its distinctive historical and cultural backgrounds. Nor does it take into account that a societal form is a historical construction enabled through numerous interactions with other societies. In this respect, it tends to dichotomize the world, putting the multiplicity of the world into a simple representational hierarchical framework with Western societies in the top order. This framework somewhat parallels the Eurocentric understanding of the world, which tends to distinguish between the desirable West and the undesirable non-West. In this respect, I hope that this chapter would be a contribution to problematizing the taken-for-granted Eurocentric discursive system and to an effort to overcome it.
CHAPTER 3
THE HISTORICAL FORMATION AND TRANSFORMATION OF THE DISCOURSE OF Sŏnjin’guk

As discourse reflects power relations and specific historical circumstances in its formation and transformation, the discourse of sŏnjin’guk has changed its assumptions and characteristics, reflecting South Korea’s historical developmental conditions. In this respect, the discourse of sŏnjin’guk is rather variable than constant in the process of historical circumstantial transitions. Its main characteristics are affected by various factors at the national and global levels, such as governmental goals and policies, public sentiment and participation, world political economic situation, and global discourses.

This chapter aims to examine the historical formation and transformation of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk from the establishment of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) in 1948 to the present, focusing on the changes of the connotation of the central concept of sŏnjin’guk in different historical circumstances. Considering the significance of governmental change for historical circumstance, I distinguish the following five periods in observing the change of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk: the periods of the Lee Seung-Man administration (1948-1960), the Park Chung-Hee administration (1961-1979), the Chun Doo-Hwan and Roh Tae-Woo administrations (1980-1993), the Kim Young-Sam administration (1993-1998), and the Kim Dae-Jung administration to the
present (1998-2008). On the basis of this periodization, this chapter examines the continuities and discontinuities of the discourse of sŏnjin ‘guk throughout those periods in terms of its central concepts and ideas, construction of national identities, representation of the West, and Eurocentric implications. For this, I conduct discourse analyses of newspaper texts, focusing on what relations and meanings are constructed around the concepts of sŏnjin ‘guk and hujin ‘guk. I also investigate how those concepts are utilized in the public discursive sphere in certain historical circumstances, in relation to other dominant discourses.

For the analyses of the periods until 1999, I use the articles of the Chosun Ilbo, the oldest leading conservative newspaper in South Korea, which has reflected mainstream developmentalist voices in the country. Using the search function of the Chosun Ilbo archive, I have obtained 860 articles containing the term sŏnjin ‘guk in their title, and 203 articles having hujin ‘guk in their title from 1948 to 1999. For the period of 2000-2008, I have used the articles obtained for chapter two: that is, 469 editorials from the Chosun Ilbo, the Dong-a Ilbo, and the Hankyoreh, which contain the term sŏnjin ‘guk in either title or body.

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32 This does not mean that the transformation of the discourse of sŏnjin ‘guk exactly corresponds to the change of political power. I consider that the discourse is so popular that its transformation occurs in a far broader historical context than the governmental change. Thus, the periodization is mainly for the analytical purpose.

33 For the term sŏnjin ‘guk, I obtained 860 cases total: 6 cases (1948-1960); 18 cases (1961-1969); 107 cases (1970-1979); 257 cases (1980-1992); 381 cases (1993-1997); and 91 cases (1998-1999). For the term hujin ‘guk, I obtained 203 articles total: 66 cases (1948-1960); 53 cases (1961-1969); 24 cases (1970-1979); 22 cases (1980-1992); 33 cases (1993-1997); and 5 cases (1998-1999). It is interesting to note that, in general, the use of the term sŏnjin ‘guk is on the increase whereas the term hujin ‘guk is on the decline. The increase of the term sŏnjin ‘guk is especially noticeable in the 1970s and in the period of the Kim Young-Sam administration.
This chapter has five substantive sections according to the periodization. The first section examines the interactions between the discourses of munmyŏng (civilization) and development in Korea during the Lee administration in relation to the global discursive transition from civilization to developmentalism. The second section investigates the rise of the discourse of sŏnjin'guk and developmentalism in relation to the formation of the developmental regime during the Park administration. The third section explores the changes of the discourse of sŏnjin'guk during the Chun administration in relation to the rise of the global neoliberal regime and its pressure on Korea to open its market. The fourth section analyzes the characteristics of the discourse of sŏnjin'guk during the Kim administration in relation to its promotion of the segyeohwa (globalization) project. And, the fifth section looks into the development of the discourse of sŏnjin'guk in regard to Korea’s neoliberal transformation in the 2000s.

THE DISCURSIVE CHANGE FROM MUNMYŎNG TO DEVELOPMENT: 1948-1960

In the period of the Lee Seung-Man administration, the capitalist development of South Korea was at the low level. Lacking the infrastructure of economic development, the political economy of the Lee administration relied much upon foreign aids. In terms of capitalist development, this period is characterized as the times when a zero-sum type of the accumulation of wealth advantageous to the dominant class was prevalent, rather
than productive activities and competitive accumulation of capital (Seo 1991:73). Despite this political economic situation, the Lee administration did not pay sufficient attention to economic development (Yoon 2005:85). The Lee administration relied on authority and coercive measures for its rule, without providing a good deal of material and mental rewards to people. Thus, the Lee administration had many characteristics of a “predatory state” (Evans 1995; Cho 2003; Yoon 2005).

In discursive terms, the discourse of development was not dominant in this period. In the wake of the Korean War, the Lee administration focused more on the need for anti-communism for its rule, than on the urgency of economic development. In some sense, the newly emerging discourse of development at the global level was not yet widely accepted by Korean elites as well as the public. In this situation, anti-communism was the most notable dominant discourse in this period. With the discourse of anti-communism, the Lee administration maintained harsh oppression of various opposing political groups. In this respect, some researchers characterize the Korean society under the Lee administration as “pangong kyuyul sahoe” (anti-communist regimented society) (Cho 2003).

In terms of the history of Eurocentric discourse, the discourse of munmyŏng was still popular in this period, which was premised upon a distinction between munmyŏng (civilization) and yaman (barbarism). However, the connotations of the concepts of munmyŏng and munmyŏng-guk (civilized country) were different from those of the times when the global discourse of civilization was in full swing around the turn of the century. In the wake of the two world wars, which were committed by the so called
“munmyŏng-guk,” the connotation of munmyŏng became diversified, e.g., chŏngsin munmyŏng (spiritual civilization) and muljil munmyŏng (material civilization), and the Eurocentric notion of human progress in the discursive framework of civilization was seriously doubted. As Patterson (1997:49) points out, “[t]he brutality and human suffering the war [the two world wars] had brought made it difficult to talk of human progress.”

Above all, the authority of munmyŏng-guk came to be somewhat weak as munmyŏng referred to muljil munmyŏng in many cases. In this sense, many articles in the Chosun Ilbo casted doubts on the “progress” of munmyŏng (or muljil munmyŏng). While munmyŏng was thought to have brought about considerable convenience to everyday life, it was also blamed as a source of numerous problems, such as diseases (cancer, mental diseases), traffic accidents, the corruption of humanity, the horror of atomic and hydrogen bombs, and so forth. In this respect, many articles appreciated the value of chŏngsin munmyŏng, which tended to be associated with Eastern or Korean civilization in contrast with Western material civilization. With regard to this, an opinion column written by Park Jong-Hwa, a famous Korean poet, argued:

Now humankind is in a crisis of being degenerated into the non-human animal even though (s)he is said to stand at the peak of material civilization. Human beings are now devaluing humanity. It is the sin of Western modern civilization, rather than that of the East, that has driven human beings into this inhumane world. It is because the scientific civilization of the very recent modern era has run only to mechanic civilization, totally deviating from spiritual civilization. It is because ancient people’s, that is, Eastern people’s pursuit of spiritual aspects has changed into pleasure-seeking and imitation pursuing benefits and wealth of Western material civilization. [. . .] It would be, after all, Eastern thoughts that will save human beings. Humankind can get eternal life only when we drive ourselves into the civilization in which people love and respect one
another, can live being content amid poverty, and can find a pleasure from humble food and drink. (*Chosun* 1 January 1959)

It is important to note that no apparent epistemic hierarchy between Korea and the West was found in this discursive situation. Rather, each was regarded as the possessor of a different kind of civilization, i.e., spiritual and material ones respectively. In the discourse of munmyŏng in this period, Korea was regarded as a kind of munmyŏng-guk in the spiritual and cultural aspects. Thus, there was no visible cultural hegemony of the West, and the global discourse of civilization, which served for Western cultural authority and political economic interests in the colonial era, became far weak in Korea.

At the global level, this discursive change accompanied the decline of Europe’s hegemony and the rise of the U.S. as a new hegemon with the newly emerging discourse of (economic) development. In the discourse of development, the global discursive focus was put on “development,” rather than “civilization.” The status of “underdevelopment,” rather than “barbarism” or “savage,” was problematized, and a new epistemic hierarchy appeared between the “developed” and “underdeveloped.” The relationship between the West and the non-West began to be established in different terms within the discursive framework of development. That is to say, the hierarchy between the West and the non-West reappeared in the new discursive framework as the former was represented as the “developed” vis-à-vis the “underdeveloped” or “developing” non-West. With regard to this, Patterson (1997:49) notes that “[a]fter 1945, the United States, using arguments that echoed those of social Darwinists half a
century earlier, began to project itself as the center and driving force of Western civilization.” In this new era, he adds, “progress was measured in terms of economic growth” (ibid.:50). In those respects, the global discourse of development appeared as a historical construction, accompanying the global hegemonic transition, at the time when the previous discursive framework of progress and evolution of civilization seriously lost its authority.

In the Korean context, while munmyŏng-guk was an equivalence to the “civilized,” the term sŏnjin’guk was mainly used in referring to the “developed” and the term hujin’guk was to the “underdeveloped.” The period of the Lee administration was the time when the discourse of development was getting global significance. As the global discursive transition affected Korean discursive situation, the terms munmyŏng-guk and sŏnjin’guk were somewhat interchangeably used in referring to Western countries in this period. However, the trend was obvious that the latter was gaining more and more popularity over the former, compared with previous periods. With the rise of the global discourse of development, the terms sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk frequently appeared in articles, especially, for foreign news. In many cases, they were used in the context of discussing the economic development of hujin’guk. It seems that those terms were chosen for English words “developed” and “underdeveloped” (or “developing”) in the translations of foreign news sources.

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34 In a similar vein, Nederveen Pieterse (2001:20) states that “[w]hat Victorian anthropology was to the British Empire, modernization theory is to United States hegemony [. . .].”
35 In data, the number of cases containing the term munmyŏng-guk is 4, while that for sŏnjin’guk is 6 from 1948 to 1960.
As for the use of those terms, it is notable that the term *hujin’guk* was far more frequently used than *sŏnjin’guk*.

Reflecting that the global discourse of development highlighted the economic development of the underdeveloped, Korean development discourse began to popularize the new concept of “*hujin’guk kyŏngjegaebal*” (the economic development of *hujin’guk*). The main source of this discursive focus was international news. Many international news articles reported various policies of capitalist and communist blocs’ aids to the “underdeveloped” in the Cold War context. In this process, the term *hujin’guk* was naturally used, especially in relation to the issue of its economic development. As such, the concept of *hujin’guk* began to be formed within the discursive framework of development, and so did the concept of *sŏnjin’guk* as its conceptual counterpart. In this respect, the formation of the discourse of *sŏnjin’guk* was deeply influenced by the emergence of the global discursive focus on the “development of the underdeveloped” in the context of the Cold War. It is interesting to note that the primary focus was put on *hujin’guk* rather than on *sŏnjin’guk* in the formative period of the discourse.

The connotation of the term *hujin’guk*, however, was in no way stable in this period. Some articles reported the ambiguity of its meaning and intellectuals’ debates about it. A feature article entitled “*hujin’guk-iran muŏsin’ga*” (what is *hujin’guk*?) demonstrates well the intellectual atmosphere at the time in regard to the rise of the discourse of development (*Chosun* 12 June 1959). As its subtitle said that “‘it is that which national income is low’ – there is also a theory of the impossibility of

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36 In data, the frequency of the term *hujin’guk* is 66, while that of *sŏnjin’guk* is 6 in this period. This is the only period when the frequency of the former is higher than that of the latter.
distinguishing ‘sŏnjin and hujin’,” it was the time when the concept of hujin 'guk was in its initial formative process. According to this article, the phrase “hujin 'guk kyŏngjegaebal” was a “theme of the latest fashion.” However, it pointed out confusion about newly popularizing concepts, such as “hujin 'guk” and “kyŏngjegaebal,” and expressed a need for understanding them. It introduced intellectuals’ diverse views on what hujin 'guk was. In terms of the economic aspect, for instance, it reported that some focused on low national income, which was generally below $100 per capita while others defined it as a country that had a big gap between the rich and the poor. It noted that the hujin 'guk economy was concentrated on the “primitive” industry such as agriculture, fishery, raw material producing, etc, and had a dual structure in which advanced capitalism and the primitive industry were mixed. According to this article, hujin 'guk included Latin American countries and those countries that became recently independent after world wars. In relation to its economic underdevelopment, hujin 'guk was portrayed as having unstable, inconsistent, and corrupt political systems. Some pointed out that people in hujin 'guk were accustomed to living on family relations rather than on contract.

One the other hand, there was considerable resistance to the newly emerging classificatory system of countries. Above all, it was pointed out that those new notions on development unilaterally reflected Westerners’ values and worldviews. In this regard, a scholar mentioned that:
Hujin’guk is a term indicating a situation that economic development does not reach the normal level from the viewpoint of Westerners, and to decide its level in detail is obscure so it is unacceptable for us that ourselves are hujin’guk. (Chosun 12 June 1959)

The resistance to the newly emerging discursive framework reflected the resistance to the tendency of focusing on materiality, which was deeply associated with the newly appearing global hierarchy. In this respect, some refused to identify Eastern and Korean societies within the framework of development, and emphasized pride in Asian spiritual civilization. In this regard, a scholar argued that:

Eastern societies are considered as hujinjŏk (backward) today from Westerners’ criteria because they developed capitalism later than Western societies and the transitions from the feudal agricultural social system to the capitalist system were not smooth. However, it is not that all hujin areas show the characteristics of hujin’guk. Even though “Africa” can be designated as an uncivilized area, it is undeniable that “Asia” has been influencing Western cultures, with maintaining its unique spiritual civilizations, traditions, and values. Therefore, even though we may accept economic hujinsŏng (backwardness), we cannot say it in terms of cultural aspects. (ibid.)

As this article shows, there was a notable tendency of distinguishing between economic and cultural aspects in considering advancement and backwardness in regard to the rising discourse of development. In this respect, an economically backward country did not necessarily mean a culturally backward country.

In relation to this, there was a considerable degree of resistance to the identification of Korea as hujin’guk. In this regard, this article criticized it as “eccentric dogmatism” a National Assembly member’s statement that “like the people of various hujin’guk, who have shallow experiences in democracy, Korean people are not accustomed to the freedom of publication and […]” (ibid.) As noted above, Korea was
identified as a munmyŏng-guk within the discursive system of civilization. Thus, even within the discourse of development, Koreans tended to distinguish their “culturally rich” country from other “uncivilized underdeveloped” countries. In this respect, the resistance to the identification of Korea as hujin’guk reflected a kind of national identity crisis created by the newly emerging global discourse shored up by U.S. hegemony.

As the term hujin’guk was a highly controversial one, the relations among discursive elements around “development” were not firmly set in this period. In the discursive situation in which the preexistent discourse of civilization was strongly challenged by the newly emerging discourse of development, the terms belonging to each discourse were used in somewhat intermingled ways. For instance, the term munmyŏng-guk, instead of sŏnjin’guk, was sometimes used as a counterpart to hujin’guk (Chosun 5 April 1959). The status of sŏnjin’guk was not stably established in the new discourse of development, and was used somewhat interchangeably with munmyŏng-guk. In many cases, the use of the term sŏnjin’guk was limited to refer to the degree of capitalist industrial development. That is to say, it was used as a shortcut of sŏnjin kongŏp-guk (advanced industrial country) or sŏnjin chabonjuŭi-guk (advanced capitalist country).

In those respects, the relations among discursive elements around the concept of sŏnjin’guk were somewhat weak to establish a system of knowledge. Given the global discursive problematization of the “development of the underdeveloped,” it is notable that the discursive focus was put on the concept of hujin’guk, rather than sŏnjin’guk, in this period. Furthermore, the discourse of sŏnjin’guk or development was not yet
developed enough to be utilized as a dominant discourse by political elites. The Lee administration relied mainly upon ideological confrontation with the North, i.e., anti-communism, for its political purpose. As the developmental regime, or the alliance of political economic elites for economic development, was not manifestly formed in this period, the country generally lacked institutional infrastructure for the formation of the discourse of sŏnjin'guk. However, there was a clear trend that the use of new notions — such as hujin'guk, sŏnjin'guk, and kyŏngjegaebal — was on the increase, challenging the preexistent discursive framework of munmyŏng. In this respect, this period can be characterized as a period of discursive transition, which cultivated a soil for the formation of the discourse of sŏnjin'guk in the next period.


It was under the Park Chung-Hee administration when the strong alliance of political economic elites was created for the cause of national economic development. Seizing power through a coup d’etat in 1961, the Park regime sought for its legitimacy from the aggressive economic development project. For this, it launched the Five-Year Economic Development Plans in 1962, the first notable governmental project for national economic development. In the inauguration speech of the fifth president in 1963, Park emphasized national economic development as a historical mission by using such a
nationalistic slogan as “choguk kŭndaehwa” (the modernization of fatherland) (Kim and Cho 2003:147). The Park administration effectively combined the discursive focus on economic development and industrialization with nationalism. Pursuing it mainly through the export-oriented industrialization strategy, the government designated the year 1963 as the “year of export.” The government effectively orchestrated strategies and policies under the urgent national goal of economic development, despite various trials and errors.

In terms of capitalist development, this was the period when the accumulation of capital was made through productive activities, which accompanied the rise of industrial capitalist class such as chaebol (Seo 1991). The growth of chaebol was remarkable under the patronage of the Park administration, and the political economic alliance of the Park administration and chaebol made a solid ground for the construction of South Korean developmental regime. The discourse of development rose in association with the formation of the developmental regime, as a main discursive power legitimating it. The Korean discourse of development arose in tandem with the popularization of the global discourse of development. In this respect, the Park administration was the first notable Korean political power that actively accommodated the global discourse of development. In the global historical context, the formation of South Korean developmental regime took place “at the peak of U.S. hegemony in the temporal sense and at the crossroad of the cold war powers in the spatial terms” (C. Kim 2003:73).

This does not mean that anti-communism gave way to the discourse of development. Rather, the developmental regime utilized anti-communism for the cause
of national economic development. With regard to this, Kim and Cho (2003:149) note that the Park regime produced a new synthetic ruling discourse by combining development and anti-communism especially after 1968. Anti-communism promoted economic development as a means to win communism. As such, the South Korean developmental regime in this period was shored up by three dominant discourses: developmentalism, anti-communism, and nationalism.37

The discourse of sŏnjin’guk, as a knowledge system with a classificatory system of countries according to its criteria of national development, made an important pillar of Korean discourse of development. The classificatory system of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk naturalized and justified Korea’s pursuit of economic development, by providing the background ideas of relations between desirable sŏnjin’guk and undesirable hujin’guk on a developmental path. In this respect, developmentalism in Korea might not have been so effective, were it not for the discourse of sŏnjin’guk. With the rise of developmental regime, the concepts of sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk became more popular, and their relations were more stably arranged within the discursive system according to the criteria of national development. The development path from hujin’guk to sŏnjin’guk was assumed as linear universal one, and hujin’guk’s pursuit of achieving the status of sŏnjin’guk was constructed as a kind of historical

37 After independence from Japanese colonial rule, South Korea became incorporated into the U.S.-led world order (Lee 2004). Being a forefront line against North Korean and Chinese communists, South Korea’s geopolitical importance was well recognized by Washington. At the same time, the importance of U.S. hegemonic power was also well recognized by South Korean ruling groups. The U.S. saw poverty and underdevelopment as a fertile ground for communism in the Cold War context (Wiegersma and Medley 2000). Thus, economic development took on strategic bearings as an important tool for containing communism. In this respect, the appearance of the Park Chung-Hee regime, which discursively combined developmentalism and anti-communism, was generally welcomed and supported by the U.S. (Ma 2002; C. Kim 2003).
necessity in the discourse. In this discursive framework, South Korea was generally
classified into *hujin’guk* and the urgent problem was how to “modernize” it towards
*sŏnjin’guk*.

The rise of the discourse of *sŏnjin’guk*, as a way to categorize countries and the
world, promoted the decline of the *munmyǒng* discourse.\(^{38}\) That is to say, the hierarchy
between countries began to be set more and more according to the value of development,
rather than of civilization. However, the concept of *sŏnjin’guk* was not entirely
idealized in this period, but was used in a limited sense mainly in reference to advanced
countries in terms of economic development, industrialization, or capitalism. In this
respect, the term *sŏnjin’guk* was interchangeably used as a shortcut with *sŏnjin kongŏp-
guk* (advanced industrial country), *sŏnjin kaebal-guk* (advanced country in
development), and *sŏnjin chabonjuŭi-guk* (advanced capitalist country). In this sense,
there was still a room for Korea to take pride in its spiritual and cultural affluence vis-à-
vis *sŏnjin’guk*.

Thus, the advanced character of *sŏnjin’guk* was mainly recognized in the fields
of the economy, industry, and technology. Furthermore, the dark sides of *sŏnjin’guk*
accompanied by the process of industrialization were well recognized, such as
environmental damage, the loss of humanity, the increase of crime, etc. Under the title
“*Sŏnjin’guk*’s misbehaviors,” an opinion column pointed out that “in *sŏnjin’guk*, one
cannot wash his hands, not to mention drinking, in the river due to industrial sewage,

\(^{38}\) In our data from 1961 to 1979, the number of cases for the term “*munmyǒng-guk*” is just one, while that
for “*sŏnjin’guk*” is 125. The use of the concept “*sŏnjin’guk*” rapidly increased during the 1970s. With
regard to this, the number of cases for “*sŏnjin’guk*” in the 1960s is 18, while that for the 1970s is 107.
and all the fishes in it die, and all the seaweeds in the neighboring seawaters die [. . . ]” (Chosun 2 February 1964). This kind of negative perceptions of sŏnjin’guk was not rare in the 1960s. From that perspective, the column argued that South Korea should not resemble the negative aspects of sŏnjin’guk in its striving for economic development. As such, the concept of sŏnjin’guk in this period is somewhat far from an idealized concept of sŏnjin’guk as is prevalent today.

In the 1960s, one of the most urgent national goals was to escape from the status of hujin’guk (hujin’guk t’alp’i). As noted above, this was discursively promoted under such nationalistic slogans as “choguk kǔndaehwa.” While the national self-identity as hujin’guk was prevalent throughout the 1960s, the self-identification of chungjin’guk (mid-going country; developing country between hujin’guk and sŏnjin’guk) began to appear in the late 1960s (Chosun 14 January 1968, 21 January 1968).

The 1970s was the period when the South Korean developmental regime was solidified (Yoon 2005:151), and its association with the anti-communist regime was also strengthened, as was reflected in the slogan of “ilmyŏn kukpang, ilmyŏn kŏnsŏl” (defense on the one hand, construction on the other hand) (Kim and Cho 2003). The anti-communist developmental discourse broadened its hegemony among the public through mass mobilization movements such as saemaŭl undong (the new village movement) with a slogan of “chal sal-a bose” (let us live well). The discourse of sŏnjin’guk provided the developmental regime with national goals and identities. Reflecting the strengthening of the developmental regime, the 1970s witnessed a rapid increase of the use of the term sŏnjin’guk. It was also the period when Koreans came to
have confidence in their national development process. In this respect, they generally identified their country as *chungjin'guk* or *kaebal-dosang-guk*, and turned their discursive focus onto the concept of *sŏnjin'guk*. That is, the discursive focus began to move onto the achievement of *sŏnjin'guk* from the escape from *hujin'guk*. In this process, a tendency of idealizing *sŏnjin'guk* appeared, as an advanced being beyond industry and technology.

Reflecting the increasing popularity of the concept of *sŏnjin'guk*, a feature article in the early 1970s covered what *sŏnjin'guk* was for South Koreans. With regard to the background of covering this topic, this article said that “it is because *sŏnjin'guk* in the Korean sense reflects well what values Koreans think highly of, that is, what future of the nation they pursue” (*Chosun* 9 March 1972). As is shown in this article, *sŏnjin'guk* was constructed by South Koreans as an important reference in their modernization process. Thus, it played a central role in guiding Koreans’ imagination of the national future. Using a survey method, this article analyzed South Koreans’ perception of *sŏnjin'guk*:

*Sŏnjin'guk* is perceived in Koreans’ minds as “the countries such as the U.S. and Western European countries, which are wealthy economically and advanced not only in culture, science, and technology but also in thought and behavior.” (*ibid.*)

According to this article, *sŏnjin'guk* appeared as quite an ideal being advanced in both economic and cultural aspects in Koreans’ perception. In practice, however, the emphasis generally was put on the material aspect in considering *sŏnjin'guk*, and there was a strong degree of resistance to a tendency of perceiving it culturally rich. This
article reported that the U.S., Japan, Britain, West Germany, and France were the countries most frequently referred to as sŏnjin’guk. In this regard, the article mentioned that it was regrettable that people did not bring up Scandinavian countries for the image of sŏnjin’guk, which it thought had many valuable aspects that Korea had to learn in its drive for modernization. In the article, some Koreans included such countries as the Soviet Union and China in the category of sŏnjin’guk, which shows a certain degree of the instability of the concept. The article raised a need for a careful approach to sŏnjin’guk, pointing out that Koreans tended to perceive sŏnjin’guk too optimistically. In this regard, it insisted that “to perceive sŏnjin’guk too positively means that we are ignorant of its negative aspects” (ibid.).

Set as a national direction, sŏnjin’guk played a role as a reference of comparison. In their drive for modernization, South Koreans continuously compared their social, cultural, and political economic systems with those of sŏnjin’guk to judge where their position was. For instance, an article reported that “the death rate of pregnant women is ten times that of sŏnjin’guk [. . .]” (Chosun 27 January 1978). Another article in a similar period pointed out that Seoul’s death rate from traffic accident was 44 times that of sŏnjin’guk (Chosun 24 January 1978). As such, sŏnjin’guk provided a positive reference by which Korea’s status was judged, and directed the transformation of the country.

In the 1970s, the goal of “catching up with” sŏnjin’guk was actively promulgated by national leaders. The developmental regime vigorously promoted the national aspiration for joining the group of sŏnjin’guk by the 1980s. Under the title of
“Joining the group of sŏnjin’guk in the 1980s,” an article reported President Park Chung-Hee’s address in the opening ceremony of Pohang Iron & Steel Co.:

President Park addressed today that “this factory is the biggest factory as a single project in Korean history, in which W120billion is invested, three times the construction cost of Kyŏngbu highway, but this is just our start, compared with sŏnjin’guk that has factory with a capacity of 10million ton. [. . .] President Park says [. . .] that “[. . .] we have pride in that we also can join the group of sŏnjin’guk in the 1980s.” (Chosun 4 July 1973)

Another article reported Park’s urge for the competition with sŏnjin’guk:

President Park says that “in order to develop our economy further, we need to make technology and production unit and scale meet the global standard. We should make more efforts to get ahead of sŏnjin’guk because we are becoming a competitor with them while having competed with developing countries so far.” (Chosun 20 January 1977)

In a similar vein, an opinion column written by a business man argued for the need for “fighting spirits and efforts to win sŏnjin’guk”:

Pursuing sŏnjin’guk including our neighbor country, we should improve the level of our technology and knowledge day by day faster than them, by saving sleep, learning more diligently, researching, and developing. [. . .] The things that make sŏnjin’guk’s manufactured goods more expensive than ours today are tenacious fighting spirit and effort to stick to an assigned work, whether it is small or big, to the extent that others cannot follow, and passion for the work, which regards it as a vocation. These are what we need today. (Chosun 1 January 1977)

In terms of national self identity, South Korea was generally posited in the category of chungjin’guk in the 1970s. In the mid- and late 1970s, there appeared a tendency of designating the country as “near sŏnjin’guk,” reflecting confidence in its
rapid economic growth. In an article entitled “South Korea’s economic status improved, having already entered the rank of sŏnjin’guk,” an economic expert argued that “South Korea’s economic development stage is in the middle of entering into the rank of sŏnjin’guk from that of chungjin’guk” (Chosun 12 December 1975). This kind of self-identification was supported by some foreign sources. According to an article, a U.S. economic magazine predicted that South Korea would become sŏnjin’guk in ten years (Chosun 26 December 1975). This article reported that:

The Journal of Commercial, a leading economic magazine in the U.S., reported that Korea is expected to enter into the group of sŏnjin’guk in 10 years because of its success in economic development, and to join the OECD in 5 years. (ibid.)

Under the title of “South Korea on the rank of sŏnjin’guk,” an article reported that “a recent special report of U.S. State Department said that South Korea moved upward into the group of sŏnjin’guk, together with Brazil, Taiwan, and Mexico” (Chosun 22 June 1978). According to this article, South Korea’s Gross National Product per capita was just $697 in 1976, but its annual economic growth rate was 15.5 percent.

Given this national identity at the time, it is interesting to note that South Korea is still represented as on the threshold of the sŏnjin’guk group today. In this perception, Korea has been on the threshold of the group of sŏnjin’guk for about thirty years. In terms of mass mobilization, the Korean developmental regime and ruling elites have, in some sense, benefited from this kind of constant status of being just in front of sŏnjin’guk. With the “tangible” national goal of becoming sŏnjin’guk, they have been
able to more easily acquire consent from subordinate groups about their project of modernization and economic growth.

INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE AND IDEALIZING SÖNJINGUK: 1980-1992

The Chun Du-Hwan administration inherited much of the pervious administration’s legacy of the pursuit of national economic development combined with anti-communism and nationalism. In this period, however, international pressure on opening Korea’s market intensified, and the international factor much affected national economic strategies and policies. The Korean discourse of development more sensitively reflected changing international development circumstances, such as the rise of global neoliberal discourse and the rapid industrialization of the Newly Industrializing Countries (NICs). In discursive terms, the international pressure on Korea was reflected in the national discourse of development.

As other industrial countries targeted the NICs for market opening under the auspices of neoliberalism, the Chun regime partly changed its developmental strategy in pursuit of developmentalism based on the open door policy (Cho 2003:67). In this process, some changes occurred in the characteristics of the developmental regime, reflecting newly emerging global development discourse of neoliberalism. In terms of the relationship between the government and the private sector, the transition from a kind of “guided” development to privately led development became manifest. And,
various open door policies symbolized by privatization and liberalization began to be promoted in the 1980s (ibid.). In terms of power relationship between the public and private sectors, the government’s certain degree of adoption of neoliberal policies signaled the relative rise of the latter vis-à-vis the former. In this regard, Seo (1991) argues that the 1980s was the period when the capitalist class became strong enough to seize economic hegemony vis-à-vis the government.

In terms of discursive change in relation to developmentalism, the 1980s witnessed the rise of internationalism or globalism. Various global circumstances were increasingly taken into account in the national discourse of development. In this respect, the nationalistic discourse of economic development began to take on global bearings. In some sense, nationalistic aspects of the discourse of development became relatively weaker than the previous period in the process of accommodating Eurocentric universalism. As for the economic sphere, for instance, the argument for a need for meeting the “global standard” became stronger. The discourse of “global standard” was dispersed into various fields of Koreans’ social life. Around the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, in particular, the argument for becoming “sŏnjin simin” (advanced citizen) came to get strong discursive power. Those arguments asked for Koreans’ behavioral changes to meet the expectations of the “world” in a broad range of social life (Do 1988).39

39 To become sŏnjin simin was a major issue in the 1990s as well. For instance, the Chosun (1 January 1997) featured a series of articles under the title of “Let’s become sŏnjin simin.” In these series articles, the Chosun campaigned for having a sense of public order, such as keeping traffic order, showing restaurant etiquette, etc.
The use of the terms sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk in the early 1980s was increasingly related to international, especially trade, affairs. In many cases, the concept of sŏnjin’guk referred to international status group in international treaties and negotiations, which was in a counterpart position to hujin’guk, kaebal-dosang-guk, or the Third World. The OECD and the Group of 7 were frequently referred to as sŏnjin’guk groups, in contrast to such groups as the Group of 77, which was typically regarded as a group of kaebal-dosang-guk. In this regard, an article reported that:

The “Group of 77” has mainly targeted sŏnjin’guk for its criticisms regarding the world economic situation, and among the participating countries of this ministerial meeting are partly included those having achieved the middle level of industrialization including South Korea, Argentina, Brazil, India, and Yugoslavia. (Chosun 29 March 1983)

In terms of international affairs, South Korea maintained a clear stance as a country of NICs or kaebal-dosang-guk vis-à-vis sŏnjin’guk, and well recognized different political economic interests between the two. In this respect, articles argued that the intentions and practices of sŏnjin’guk in international affairs should be approached in a cautious way. They frequently criticized sŏnjin’guk’s pressure on South Korea in international trade. For instance, an article entitled “Sŏnjin’guk’s hypersensitivity” argued:

However, as the shares have noticeably increased, which leading developing countries such as South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore take in the world trade volume, the council of the OECD that is a group of sŏnjin’guk has shown a move from 1978 to revoke preferential tariffs and trade statuses, which have been given to hujin’guk, from six leading developing countries such as South Korea by classifying them separately as NICs. (Chosun 11 March 1984)
Another article criticized that the G-6’s Venetian declaration was virtually sŏnjin’guk’s targeting of NICs:

The “economic declaration” of the summit and the joint declaration of G-6 must be targeting South Korea and Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, which have been steadily growing in Asia, […] even though they do not point out the names of newly industrializing countries. […] With this kind of declarations, sŏnjin-daeguk [big sŏnjin’guk] have probably demonstrated their solidarity by creating a target. (Chosun 17 June 1987)

These articles well demonstrate conflicting interests between sŏnjin’guk and the NICs. Despite the rise of neoliberalism on the global stage in the 1980s, sŏnjin’guk’s pressure for opening NICs’ market was criticized on the basis of Korea’s self-identity as NICs.40

However, there was also a tendency of regarding market opening as a kind of necessary condition for entering into the group of sŏnjin’guk. This linkage between the market opening and the achievement of the status of sŏnjin’guk was appropriated by people who tended to think that market opening was inevitable. In the governmental sector, there appeared an attitude to yield to the international pressure and to gradually open Korea’s market to outside. With regard to this, an editorial entitled “Is it

40 The cautious approach to sŏnjin’guk was not limited to the international economic affairs. Many articles pointed out sŏnjin’guk’s bad behaviors against hujin’guk or kaebal-dosang-guk in environmental and social fields. As for a gas leak incident occurred in India, for instance, an article criticized that it was a tragedy related to sŏnjin’guk’s intentional transfer of polluter industries into hujin’guk; that is, “However, it draws our attention most of all that environmentalists are pointing out that some of those industrial disasters have been caused by sŏnjin’guk’s intentional transferring of their dangerous industries into the Third World that does not have any safety measure.” (Chosun 7 December 1984)

In a similar vein, an opinion column argued for South Korea’s awareness not to import polluted materials from sŏnjin’guk: “Anyway, while we have benefited from hasty developments and openings for the past twenty years, we have also undergone side-effects such as even importing Japanese industrial wastes. Now we should never repeat again this kind of ‘being a pushover’ or ‘being willing to accept lye.’ I hope that world-wide movements for protecting life occur in 1985, by which sŏnjin’guk countries restrict polluting materials by themselves and the Third World countries strictly enforce anti-pollution criteria.” (Chosun 12 January 1985)
sonjin’guk only if it opens its door?” (Chosun 1 November 1985) reported that the Korean government had set a plan to open its market “at the level of sonjin’guk” by the year of 1988 due to the pressure from the U.S. It expressed a concern about market opening, saying that “opening must not go too far.” As such, the discourse of sonjin’guk was, in some cases, appropriated by the government for its promotion of open market policy. As the articles show, there was a considerable degree of psychological resistance to being open to the international society. Yet, this kind of resistance to the international pressure and government’s open policy got weaker towards the 1990s, and the discourse of sonjin’guk was often utilized for the cause of Korea’s “internationalization.”

The period of the Chun administration was a time when the authority of political power was very weak. Taking power through such bloody events as the 12.12 coup and the Gwangju Massacre, the Chun administration lacked its political legitimacy from the beginning. Thus, Chun had to rely on various coercive political apparatuses for his rule and maintained severe policies against opposing political groups. In political economic terms, this was the period when the contradiction of rapid modernization became intensified. Those conditions entailed massive resistance movements against Chun’s power, which culminated in the 6.10 Protest in 1987. In this process, the discourse of democracy, as a resistant discourse, arose as a hegemonic discourse enough to override the discursive power of dominant groups’ developmentalism (Cho 2003:66).

In this situation, the discourse of sonjin’guk was utilized by ruling groups for their political interests. By emphasizing the national historical necessity for achieving sonjin’guk, the ruling groups implied that the massive pro-democratic movements were
the activities of creating confusion and division, and of weakening national power. The need for achieving sŏnjin’guk was more widely promoted by political leaders in the mid- and late 1980s when the pro-democratic movements were getting much broader and stronger. President Chun continuously mentioned about a need for joining the group of sŏnjin’guk throughout his presidency, and argued that the country was cruising toward sŏnjin’guk and its achievement would be possible in the near future. It is interesting to note that his use of the concept of sŏnjin’guk got intensified in 1987 when his power was in crisis in front of the huge people’s demonstrations. In March 1987, for instance, as many as three articles in our data reported about Chun’s emphasis on the achievement of sŏnjin’guk. In an article, he mentioned that:

We have now come to grab the doorknob for entering the group of sŏnjin’guk by virtue of the achievements we made for the past six years. Based on these, we have to make more efforts this year to become a grand leading part of world history [. . .]. (Chosun 5 March 1987)

In the very next day, he said again that “we will necessarily become sŏnjin’guk after transferring the government peacefully next year and successfully hosting the Olympics with united power (Chosun 6 March 1987). About a week later, he maintained that “we have now finished the preparation for heading for sŏnjin’guk as having overcome various hardships for the past six years by uniting all people’s minds and powers (Chosun 13 March 1987).

Facing massive resistances from national citizens, the South Korean ruling groups, which had close historical relationships with foreign powers, might have had
more recourse to sŏnjin’guk. In relation to this, a tendency of idealizing sŏnjin’guk was notable in this period. In this tendency, the advanced character of sŏnjin’guk came to be no longer limited to some material aspects, such as industry and technology, but was broadened to spiritual aspects. Thus, sŏnjin’guk was represented not only as materially prosperous, but also culturally mature. In this way, the sŏnjin’guk discourse encroached the old assumption of Eastern civilization’s cultural superiority vis-à-vis the West. As the West was mainly represented as sŏnjin’guk, this was an important point where the idealized image of the West reemerged in Korea after the crisis of the discourse of civilization. Koreans’ cultural pride vis-à-vis the West became gradually undermined in the idealizing process of sŏnjin’guk. The idealization of the West was promoted by some high profile intellectuals. In an opinion column entitled “Things that we don’t have,” Kim DongGil, a professor at Yonsei University, wrote that:

In the West, men and women in the streets generally dress far better than us. This does not mean expensive clothes but that they dress plainly fitting to their bodies in a fancy way by coordinating colors. What an artistically touching thing is to be fitting well. [. . .] Westerners also make home better than us. Even if they make home in a one-room apartment, it has all that are needed and all things are posited in right places, which are both convenient and beautiful. [. . .] Isn’t it that we rarely have cultural life? [. . .] A reason why I somewhat hurt my self-respect in seeing Westerners is that their rich common sense and rationality are lacking to us who are proud of that, so to speak, “light is from the East.” I don’t know if light came from the East 5,000 or 3,000 years ago, but it is clearly not the case now. This is a very painful realization. Kindness is a part of common sense. But, isn’t it that we don’t have kindness. [. . .] I am wondering if Koreans are to be this kind of Koreans anywhere in the world. [. . .]. (Chosun 19 January 1986)

This does not mean that there was no resistance to the national aspiration for sŏnjin’guk. In fact, the idealizing process of sŏnjin’guk or the West was continuously in
tension with a kind of traditional perspective valuing spiritual and cultural aspects. In this perspective, the process of becoming sŏnjin'guk was criticized for its material focus. And, various side-effects of material development were well recognized. In this view, sŏnjin'guk was still considered in a limited sense mainly as industrially advanced, e.g., sŏnjin kongŏp-guk (advanced industrial country), which carried various negative aspects with it. An opinion column, for instance, pointed out that:

We frequently hear and see the term “sŏnjin” recently. However, it seems that the “meaning of sŏnjin” is mainly weighed on the criteria of material improvements such as the increase of national wealth, the growth of national income, export growth, high level of mass-consumption, the improvement of productivity, the promotion of industrialization, the nurturing of leisure industry, high buildings, the increase of private cars, the expansion of paved roads, and so forth. (Chosun 16 November 1983)

On the basis of this, this article emphasized non-material values, such as “greed control” and “to practice the wisdom of ancestors to share even a piece of bean.”

In a similar vein, an opinion column written by a woman artist mentioned that “it is said that when it becomes sŏnjin’guk, crimes increase and thus people’s concerns get deep while new buildings are going higher and cultural events are getting diverse” (Chosun 11 November 1984). Some expressed more direct concerns about South Korea’s efforts for becoming sŏnjin’guk. A feature article entitled “The culture and things of sŏnjin’guk . . . are they really all ‘good things’?” argued that blind acceptance of foreign materials and cultures should be avoided, and that the recovery of pride in Korean tradition and culture was important (Chosun 1 January 1983). It acknowledged that sŏnjin’guk, mainly as an industrial being, had both advantages and disadvantages
associated with industrialization. Some articles contested the concept of sŏnjin’guk in relation to Koreans’ national identity and pride. Under the subtitle “A country that has a lot of traditions and cultures is sŏnjin’guk . . . ‘let’s have spiritual pride’,” an opinion column written by Han Young-Woo, a professor at Seoul National University, wrote that:

In regard to a country’s level or wealth, one cannot easily designate sŏnjin’guk or hujin’guk just based on visible material. Spiritual wealth should be included in it. A country having a lot of precious cultural traditions cannot be called as hujin-jógín (backward) country even if its material life is somewhat backward. [. . .] We have frequently heard our country is chungjin’guk or kaebal-dosang-guk. It is not that this does not have any validity in terms of the economy and technology. However, a condition should be attached to that kind of expression as long as the economy and technology are not all of national wealth. Frankly speaking, there is something that we have earned because of the idea of “kaebal-dosang-guk,” but there are many other things that we have lost and there are some easy problems that have not been easily solved. As long as we have confidence and pride in traditional cultures, our cultural heritages can be globalized to any extent, and this may be the biggest potential wealth that we have. [. . .] [Our country] is a country that has far more historical cultural advantages than the so-called sŏnjin’guk which we are now trying hard to catch up with. [. . .] [In the past] we never lost pride even for a moment for ourselves that we were sŏnjin’guk. (Chosun 11 March 1986)

SEGYEHWA AND GLOBAL STANDARD FOR SŎNJIN’GUK: 1993-1997

Having achieved industrialization and democratization, Korea in the 1990s needed different national development strategies. At the global level, the neoliberal trend was intensifying with the popularization of the globalization discourse. In these national and global situations, there raised a need to “upgrade Korea” to effectively meet the global challenge based upon “successful” achievement of “modernization,” e.g.,
industrialization and democratization (Park 2006). In this context, the Kim Young-Sam administration inaugurated with an ambition of drastically reforming the country to be competitive in the global circumstance. It actively embraced the global discourse of globalization and tried to transform the country to be compatible with the global trend. It assumed that the preexisting socio-economic system constructed through the rapid modernization period was not suitable to the new era of globalization.

In this regard, President Kim widely promoted the slogan of “sinhan ‘guk ch’angjo” (the creation of new Korea) and emphasized the need for achieving sŏnjin’guk. He actively employed the discourse of international competition for the purpose of his reform policies (Y. Kim 2003). Supposing Korea as facing harsh international competitions, he insisted that it would collapse just on the threshold of the rank of sŏnjin’guk without curing “han’gukbyŏng” (the problem of Korea) through strong reformation drive. In this respect, Kang (2000:444) argues that “reformation” and “competitiveness” were “two of the discourse-constituents of ‘New Korea’ in 1993.”

In his New Year’s address in 1995, President Kim promulgated a need for segyehwa (globalization) as a way to win international competition by defining the international circumstance as both crisis and opportunity (Y. Kim 2003). In this situation, the tendency of judging the Korean society by “global” criteria further intensified. While the segyehwa discourse was intended as an active response to the global discourse of globalization, it also contributed to uncritically accepting various politically charged international neoliberal policies, especially those promoted by the U.S., as “global standard” (Seong 2001; Cho 2001).
Another notable aspect of Korea’s development in this period was the change of the nature of its developmental regime into that which was actively willing to meet the “global standard.” In Cho’s (2003:84) terms, this was a transition from the old developmental regime to “neo-developmental regime,” which was based upon the discourse of *segyehwa* as a neo-modernization discourse. In terms of developmental discourse, the transition occurred from protective developmentalism to open-door developmentalism (*ibid.*). Neoliberal economic philosophy played an important role in providing knowledge to this transition. In this respect, Lee (2003) designates the transition as that from the developmental state to a “neoliberal competing state,” which prioritized neoliberal values for obtaining competitiveness in international competition. With regard to the cause of the crisis of the conventional developmental state, Yoon (2005) notes three main factors: the pressure from the world system, democratization, and the growth of private capital, which reflect the changes of the developmental state’s relationships with the world system, civil society, and capital respectively. According to him, the developmental regime virtually collapsed by the Kim administration’s pursuit of liberalization and opening of the finance sector in the early 1990s (Yoon 2005).

The development of the discourse of *sŏnjin’guk* during the 1990s was deeply influenced by the Kim Young-Sam administration’s launch of a strong drive for reformation on a broad range of national affairs. In particular, the reformation drive promoted under the banner of *segyehwa* played an important role in forming the discourse of *sŏnjin’guk* with the contemporary characteristics. The government carried out various reformation policies under the cause of enhancing national competitiveness.
to meet “global standard” in a variety of areas. In terms of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, the Kim administration approached its domestic and foreign affairs with a national identity of “almost sŏnjin’guk” in a substantial sense. Along with the “successful” hosting of the Seoul Olympic Games in the late 1980s, various incidents during the early and mid 1990s gave Koreans confidence in forming this identity, such as the establishment of a democratic civilian administration, the plan of joining the OECD club, the popularization of abroad trips, and so forth. Under those circumstances, significant amount of discursive power was put on the need to make vigorous efforts to get the country into the rank of solid sŏnjin’guk.

Given those conditions, not only the concept of sŏnjin’guk became far more popularized in its use in the public, but also its connotation became far more generalized and idealized. In regard to this, the term sŏnjin’guk appeared beyond the field of industry and technology, and was used in far diverse areas, such as education, labor, environment, diseases, traffic, etc. In these various areas, sŏnjin’guk was represented as an ideal being. That is to say, it was an advanced being not just in terms of industry and technology, but also in almost every aspect of society. Given that the concept of sŏnjin’guk is Koreans’ own discursive construction, the idealization of sŏnjin’guk as the “other” accompanies, in some ways, the increase of self-dissatisfaction. In this respect, as sŏnjin’guk was idealized, Korea’s national self got smaller vis-à-vis sŏnjin’guk.

In this period, the desire for achieving the status of sŏnjin’guk appeared to be far stronger than those in any previous times. With a self-national identity of “almost
sŏnjin’guk,” more Koreans felt that the aspiration had become supported by substantial national political economic power and thus that the achievement of national goal came to be in a more tangible and realistic historical condition. Given the sentiment of the end of century, such a slogan as “achieving sŏnjin’guk in the twentieth-century” became popularized (Chosun 24 July 1995). While sŏnjin’guk as a national vision tended to be promoted mainly by a relatively small number of opinion leaders in previous periods, its necessity was more widely shared by a broader range of population. In this respect, the discourse of sŏnjin’guk far strengthened its hegemonic status in this period as a dominant way of representing national self and the world. Beyond the field of the economy and technology, virtually every corner of society was asked to be engaged in transformation towards sŏnjin’guk.

In those conditions, the concept of sŏnjin’guk underwent some notable changes in its way of use and connotation. First, the use of the abstract type of the concept increased, in which the referent of the term sŏnjin’guk was not specified. Rather than being a specific entity, it tended to exist as an image and a representation, to which Koreans’ various positive values were projected. This is somewhat unique phenomenon observed in this period, in the sense that the concept of sŏnjin’guk in previous periods was more frequently used as a concrete type referring to specific countries, international organizations, or international status in some limited fields such as the economy, international trade, and technology. As the scope of the use of the concept expanded, its connotation became more abstract and broader.
Second, in relation to the increase of its abstractness, the image of sŏnjin’guk became far more idealized. Going beyond a shortcut of sŏnjin kongŏp-guk (advanced industrial country) in a limited sense, it tended to get represented as an advanced country in virtually every field of society. Sŏnjin ’guk was not just an advanced country in some limited fields such as the economy and technology, but an advanced country in every corner of society including the cultural field, which had been a sphere that Koreans maintained a sense of pride over Western industrial countries. The negative aspects of sŏnjin ’guk or sŏnjin kongŏp-guk frequently recognized in previous periods, such as dehumanization, damage to the environment, the increase of crime, etc., were rarely pointed out in this period. Challenges to the concept of sŏnjin’guk and to the designation of South Korea’s identity within the discourse of sŏnjin ’guk became rare and marginalized either. Western countries arose as role models by which various aspects of the Korean society were to be evaluated. Western models tended to be regarded as universal ones and the historical and contextual differences between them and Korea were ignored.41

And third, given the identity shift from kaebal-dosang-guk or NICs to “almost sŏnjin’guk” in a substantial sense, the perception of conflicting interests between South Korea and sŏnjin ’guk abated. There was a rather strong tendency to consider that expectations from sŏnjin ’guk were to be met in order for South Korea to join the sŏnjin’guk club. Groups of major industrial countries, such as the G-7, were mainly termed as the group of “sŏnjin’guk” rather than other expressions such as sŏbang-guk

41 With regard to this, it is interesting to see that an article interpreted a low turnout of Korean voters in an election as “sŏnjin’guk-hyŏng (sŏnjin’guk-style) voting tendency” (Chosun 21 June 1991).
(Western countries). Criticisms of sŏnjin'guk's policies and strategies in international affairs far waned too. Rather, there appeared a tendency to regard sŏnjin'guk as a central promoter of the inevitable global trend that South Korea had to follow to achieve the status of sŏnjin'guk. With regard to the pressure of market opening from sŏnjin'guk, for instance, an article argued that “liberalization and opening to outside are already irreversible general trends of the international society” and emphasized that “the problem is to quickly prepare policies and institutions for ourselves, which are fitting to the era of liberalization and opening” (Chosun 29 March 1995). The requests from sŏnjin'guk, which were often perceived as a kind of “pressure” in previous periods, came to be frequently regarded as “global standard.” This even played a yardstick to gauge the degree of advancement or backwardness of the Korean society. As the nation being “almost sŏnjin'guk” as an OECD member, South Koreans partly internalized sŏnjin'guk’s interests as their own ones. As for the liberalization of foreign exchange transactions in South Korea, for instance, an article argued:

It is needless to mention the financial liberalization of the OECD, a sŏnjin'guk group. The contemporary foreign currency law is that which was made to enable the government to manage dollar currency in the past when the dollar currency was very rare. But, the regulation still remains even though all of the causal factors disappeared with increasing amount of dollars. It is only our country that ransacks normal people’s purses and handbags in order to check the costs of travelling abroad. (Chosun 5 February 1994)

42 Until the 1980s, the groups of countries such as the G-7 and the OECD, which are regarded as representative sŏnjin'guk groups today, were often referred to as groups of “sŏbang guk” (Western countries), “sŏnjin konggŏp-guk” (advanced industrial country), or “sŏnjin kaebal-guk” (advanced country in development). In this regard, a piece of international news in 1985 called the G-7 as “sŏbang 7 guk” (seven Western countries) (Chosun 2 May 1985).
Contrasting Korea with the OECD countries in terms of foreign exchange policies, this article argued for a need for following the global trend of financial liberalization.

As for national identity, many articles considered that Korea had been moving successfully towards the status of sŏnjin’guk. As noted above, it was the 1970 when the identity of South Korea as just in front of the sŏnjin’guk group notably appeared in the public sphere. While this national identity was presented by a relatively small number of opinion leaders as an optimistic interpretation of national status, it was far more popularized in the public during the 1990s. In this regard, an opinion column entitled “National character and sŏnjin’guk” argued that “it is because the dawn of the era of sŏnjin’guk is just about to begin now, clearly separating from the past” (Chosun 20 December 1995). In this sentiment, hujin’guk and kaebal-dosang-guk were regarded as the past of Korea and sŏnjin’guk as its future. Building a full-fledged sŏnjin’guk was accepted as a more tangible national vision that could be achieved in the near future. This phenomenon became far more distinct after the mid-1990s, when Korea joined the OECD. 43 Various governmental policies to cope with Korea’s entering into the rank of sŏnjin’guk were prepared (Chosun 29 March 1995, 6 June 1995). Discursive foci were put on transforming the virtually every field of society to meet to the “criteria” of sŏnjin’guk to push the move over the threshold of sŏnjin’guk towards a full-fledged sŏnjin’guk. In this regard, an article argued that “as South Korea has become an economic sŏnjin’guk by joining the OECD, shouldn’t we become a sŏnjin’guk in the field of broadcasting?” (Chosun 24 November 1997)

43 South Korea joined the OECD in December 1996.
Various campaign-style series articles, which argued for learning from sŏnjin 'guk and upgrading Korea to sŏnjin 'guk, were launched in this period. They covered a broad range of fields including cultural heritage, civil awareness, the environment, energy saving, traffic problems, and so forth. Becoming sŏnjin 'guk and sŏnjin simin (advanced citizen) arose as an urgent problem (Chosun 1 January 1997). Virtually every corner of society became under scrutiny by newspaper articles for the cause of building sŏnjin 'guk, which generated a clear epistemic hierarchy between Korea and sŏnjin 'guk. The aspects that were not regarded as those of sŏnjin 'guk were often stigmatized as those of hujin 'guk that were to be quickly redressed. Many series articles introduced the examples of sŏnjin 'guk as model cases in various fields. In this way, sŏnjin 'guk became a stronger reference point by which various aspects of Korean society were judged and evaluated, and the authority of sŏnjin 'guk became far stronger as well.

The concept of sŏnjin 'guk was often appropriated for political interests. An article entitled “We cannot be a sŏnjin 'guk if the real-name financial system is not settled,” for instance, used the concept of sŏnjin 'guk as a national vision to promote a governmental financial policy (Chosun 30 November 1995). It is interesting to note that the political appropriation of the concept of sŏnjin 'guk was not an exception for “progressive” social groups. With regard to this, an environmentalist group raised a need for a tightened environmental regulation on gasoline production by arguing that “most oil companies are not reaching sŏnjin 'guk criteria” (Chosun 3 September 1997). This shows that counter-developmental progressive groups in political economic
struggle were not necessarily counter-groups in terms of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk. In this respect, the discourse of sŏnjin’guk could be regarded as “hegemonic” discourse as its basic assumptions were naturally accepted by a broad range of social groups.

With the increase of the popularity of the concept of sŏnjin’guk, the terms sŏnjin’guk-hyŏng (sŏnjin’guk-type) and sŏnjin’guk-sujun (sŏnjin’guk-level) were frequently used to evaluate certain aspects of the society and eventually to suggest a direction of change. An opinion column written by the president of a private university demonstrates well the atmosphere of the mid-1990s regarding the concept of sŏnjin’guk:

We all are aspiring for becoming sŏnjin’guk in the upcoming 21st century, and we should necessarily become sŏnjin’guk. [. . .] Our country has reached the threshold of sŏnjin’guk by achieving miraculous economic development to have GDP per capita of $10,000 just in front of us in the late 1995, from the status of hujin’guk that had GDP per capita of $80 in the 1960s. However, sŏnjin’guk does not only mean to have big trade amount economically, to have a lot of productive facilities, or to have affluent mineral resources. Rather, a country that can create new technology and invent new productions, and that have capacity to raise high-tech industries competitive world-wide is a true economic sŏnjin’guk. [. . .] After all, it is impossible for our country to head for sŏnjin’guk without the reformation of technology, living, and education. It would be the right way to solidify the road for sŏnjin’guk to nurture human resources that have fair personality valuing frankness for one’s life, diligence and the spirit of sacrifice serving for neighbors, language ability to meet the high-tech era of international competition, and computer ability. (Chosun 24 July 1995)

The aspiration of building sŏnjin’guk became stronger to the extent of regarding it as a historical necessity, especially when combined with a perception of increasing competition in the “globalizing” world economy. In terms of international trade, many articles pointed out that South Korea was in a “sandwiched” situation between the quality of sŏnjin’guk’s products and the price competitiveness of hujin’guk’s. As for a weakness of Korea’s products in international settings, an article reported that “foreign
productions are rapidly driving away national productions with the opening of the domestic market that has been closed” (Chosun 4 April 1993). This kind of sense of crisis reinforced the cause of achieving sŏnjin’guk, which in turn exerted a mobilization effect across the country. As for South Korea’s performance compared with main competitors in a race for sŏnjin’guk, an article reported that “our country recorded the lowest growth among the Asian NICs last year” and that “only we failed to enter into sŏnjin’guk among the four Asian dragons, and now fell into a situation of being classified into the same group with Malaysia and Thailand” (Chosun 11 March 1993).

In this sense, the discourse of sŏnjin’guk requested hard endeavors in every field of the country to become sŏnjin’guk lest it should retrogress back to hujin’guk in the twenty-first century. This served for reinforcing the hegemony of ruling groups by implying the importance of integration, rather than split, of the country towards the urgent cause. On the other hand, a sense of crisis was well combined with a sense of optimism about the future of Korea. In this respect, the goal of sŏnjin’guk was suggested by both domestic and foreign sources as a great possibility in the very near future.

44 In this regard, in a series of campaign-type feature articles entitled “Let’s run again too,” an article warned about the possibility of “falling into hujin’guk in the 21st century if not running now” in its subtitle (Chosun 30 August 1991).
In the wake of the economic crisis that brought about the IMF intervention in the late 1990s, South Korea has undergone a drastic neoliberal transformation. Various structural adjustment programs exercised in the public and private sectors during the Kim Dae-Jung administration were based upon a diagnosis that the economic crisis was caused by Korea’s lack of competitiveness to the global circumstances. In this situation, strong reformation policies were employed in various fields of the country under the cause of strengthening national competitiveness. In this process, neoliberal ideas provided justification to transformations as the only way to follow the global trend and eventually to survive in global competition.\textsuperscript{45}

The discourse of sŏnjin’guk played an important role in the country’s neoliberal transformation. The promoters of neoliberalism appropriated it by linking neoliberal transformation to the cause of achieving sŏnjin’guk. For them, most sŏnjin’guk were neoliberal countries and neoliberal socio-economic system was an inevitable global trend. Thus, it was urgent for Korea to transform itself into a neoliberal country to go with the global trend and ultimately join the sŏnjin’guk group. This kind of logic has been prevalent in the mainstream public discursive sphere until recent years.

\textsuperscript{45} Neoliberal policies are criticized by many theorists. For instance, Yoon (2005:172) criticizes the Kim administration’s neoliberal policies that “it is no more than to solve the economic crisis, which was caused by neoliberal economic (and financial) liberalization after the 1990s, by a stronger neoliberal prescription.” Chang (2008) argues that neoliberalism has failed in all fronts of main economic dimension: growth, equality, and stability.
Reflecting the discourse of neoliberal globalization, the “conservative” Chosun and Dong-a Ilbo perceived the world as a system of limitless competition, in which only competitive countries could survive. In this respect, the term “kyŏngjaeng” (competition) and “kyŏngjaengnyŏk” (competitive power) were frequently used in relation to the neoliberal need for transformation as well as the necessity of achieving sŏnjin’guk. In this situation, South Korea tended to be considered as having just two practical options: “to aggressively participate in the limitless competition system or to join the group of grumbler falling behind the competition” (Chosun 20 November 2005).

On the basis of neoliberal ideas, mainstream newspapers argued that maintaining the small government was sŏnjin’guk’s trend and the global trend, and thus should be adopted by the South Korean government. For instance, as for governmental reformation, an editorial of the Chosun Ilbo argued that:

The OECD, a sŏnjin’guk club, questioned in the “year 2007 economy report for South Korea” that “can it become the Hub of Northeast Asia with regulating the metropolitan area? And, is the balanced local development driven by the central government efficient?” As [our] government runs directly against the global trend, they might not have been able to understand the situation. (Chosun 17 March 2007)

This article of the “conservative newspaper” criticized the “progressive” Roh Moo-Hyun administration’s policies for maintaining a “big” government, by relying on the authority of the OECD, a sŏnjin’guk club. It implied that the perspective of the OECD as a sŏnjin’guk group was a global trend, which the Korean government should follow.

Neoliberal policies were advocated by the “conservative” Chosun Ilbo and Dong-a Ilbo as a way for enhancing efficiency in terms of the interests of capital. Under
the title of “The 2006 sŏnjin’guk trend,” the Dong-a argued that some keywords were found in the trend of sŏnjin’guk policies, such as the downsizing of the government, the privatization of public enterprise, deregulation, pro-business policy, and the open market (Dong-a 26 December 2006). It insisted that this trend could be summarized by a phrase of “small government, big market.” The neoliberal trend was even regarded as natural and normal, and policies against this supposed trend was criticized as abnormal. Under the title of “‘normality’ and ‘abnormality’ – the case of President Roh Moo-Hyun,” an editorial of the Chosun argued that:

Regarding the unemployment problem, it is normal to absorb unemployed people by promoting private business and increasing jobs. However, the President argues that it is okay to increase public officials and social jobs paid by the national budget. Because of this abnormal idea, for the past 4 years when every sŏnjin’guk strived for the reduction of public officials and the privatization of public enterprises, this administration increased public officials by 61,000 and stopped privatization. (Chosun 15 October 2007)

In this article, sŏnjin’guk was represented as the subject employing the “normal” policy, which was based upon the reduction and privatization of public sectors, and provided a reference point by which the Korean government was criticized. For its promotion of neoliberal policies, the editorial used the concept of sŏnjin’guk as a ground for justifying it. In a similar vein, an editorial of the Dong-a argued that:

It is a global trend and a correct way to make a “small government” to reduce regulations and promote the vitality of the private sector. It is proved by the cases of sŏnjin’guk including the U.S. and Japan, which have succeeded in the revitalization of the economy by the reduction of the government role and the promotion of the market role” (Dong-a 24 January 2008).
This article shows well how the concept of sŏnjin’guk was appropriated for the purpose of promoting neoliberal policies. In this article, the cases of the U.S. and Japan as sŏnjin’guk were used as exemplary cases demonstrating the necessity of neoliberal ideas and policies. In this way, the concept of sŏnjin’guk was utilized by the promoters of neoliberalism as a source of authority for their arguments.

The promotion of the market ideology was related to the conservative newspapers’ belief in the principle of “liberal democracy.” For instance, under the title “We will defend liberty and the market,” an editorial of the Dong-a (1 April 2006) argued that “one cannot be sŏnjin’guk with anti-market ideology.” As such, the promoters of neoliberalism intended to justify the neoliberal prioritization of liberty and the market under the cause of achieving sŏnjin’guk.

It is interesting to note the difference between the “conservative” Chosun and Dong-a Ilbo and the “progressive” Hankyoreh. In terms of neoliberalism, the progressive newspaper showed distinct differences from the conservative ones in the sense that it clearly opposed to neoliberal ideas and practices. However, in terms of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, the Hankyoreh did not show a notable difference from them. Despite the Eurocentric developmental bearings of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, the Hankyoreh did not challenge its authority. Rather, like the conservative newspapers, the Hankyoreh also tended to rely on the authority of the concept of sŏnjin’guk in making its arguments. For instance, the Hankyoreh (14 October 2008) argued that “many sŏnjin’guk including the U.S. are strengthening regulation and conducting nationalization after being hit by the boomerang of excessive financial deregulation.” In
a similar vein, another editorial of it argued that “it is a trend in sŏnjin’guk to increase tax for the wealthy and support the weak class in order to stimulate the economy and to make social harmony [. . .]” (Hankyoreh 1 December 2008). As such, the Hankyoreh was different from the conservative newspapers in terms of the contents of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, e.g., what sŏnjin’guk was. However, it rarely challenged its basic discursive structure, such as the authority of sŏnjin’guk vis-à-vis alienated hujin’guk.

On the other hand, there are not many significant differences between the 1990s and the 2000s in terms of the characteristics of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk. Regardless of the difference in the strength of promulgation, all of the three administrations since 1998 have aimed for achieving sŏnjin’guk in the near future. A notable phenomenon in this period was that the basic assumptions of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk formed in the 1990s became more popularized and naturalized. That is to say, while a necessity to keep up with the “global trend” to become sŏnjin’guk was actively promoted by the government with such a slogan as segyehwa in the previous period, it was more naturally accepted in the public during this period.46

The tendency to diagnose the Korean society by “global standard” also became much taken-for-granted in relation to the discourse of sŏnjin’guk. In this regard, sŏnjin’guk was often represented as the embodiment of “global standard” and “global trend.” Korea’s national identity as on the threshold of the rank of sŏnjin’guk became more popularized too. In the late 2000s, there found a tendency of regarding South

46 I also observe strong sentiments and movements against neoliberal globalization in Korea. However, these resistance movements are not a primary focus of this study. My arguments of this study are mostly relevant to the discourse of sŏnjin’guk as a notable dominant discourse.
Korea as a kind of sŏnjin’guk, if not full-fledged one. In relation to this, it is interesting to note that the publicly perceived condition of GDP per capita for sŏnjin’guk has increased from $20,000 to $30,000 in the late 2000s (Dong-a 15 August 2008) as South Korea has achieved the previous nodal point, both of which are far higher than internationally used criteria for high-income country. In these circumstances, Koreans’ aspiration for achieving a full-fledged sŏnjin’guk is now bigger than any other periods, and it is well reflected in the wide promulgation of the slogan of sŏnjinhwa in the Lee Myung-Bak administration.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the variation of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk throughout South Korean postwar history. The formation and transformation of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk should be understood in the context of the global discursive transition which accompanied the changes of power relations. At the global level, the postwar period can be characterized by a discursive transition from the discourse of civilization to that of development, which accompanied the power change from the hegemony of Europe to that of the U.S. Reflecting this, the formation of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk in the 1960s was conditioned by the decline of the munmyŏng discourse and the rise of the South Korean developmental regime. The initial South Korean developmental regime was led by the Park Chung-Hee administration which sought for its legitimacy from two main
discursive sources: anti-communism and developmentalism. Under the slogan of “choguk kûndaehwa,” the Park regime effectively combined those two discursive foci with nationalism.

The discourse of sŏnjin’guk supported the rise of developmentalism, by providing the interpretive frameworks of development and, in turn, giving justification to the pursuit of economic growth as a historical necessity. As the discursive transition from munmyŏng to sŏnjin’guk accompanied the degradation of Korea’s identity from munmyŏng-guk (of spiritual civilization) to hujin’guk, considerable resistances to the newly emerging perceptual frameworks of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk are found in its formative period. Moreover, sŏnjin’guk was far from an ideal being as it was mainly perceived in terms of the degree of industrialization. In this respect, negative sides of industrialization were also well recognized in regard to sŏnjin’guk, such as environmental damage, dehumanization, and the increase of crime. In this sense, the discourse of sŏnjin’guk was not necessarily Eurocentric in its beginning period.

Within the framework of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, it was raised as an urgent problem to escape the status of hujin’guk in the 1960s. Based upon confidence in the improvement of living standard accompanied by economic growth, the new national identity as chungjin’guk or kaebal-dosang-guk appeared from the late 1960s and became dominant in the 1970s. Furthermore, a perception that the nation was approaching sŏnjin’guk began to appear from the mid-1970s.

It was the 1980s when the South Korean developmental regime, which was basically nationalistic, started to take on strong international bearings. Under the
pressure from other industrial countries, South Korean developmental regime under the Chun Doo-Hwan administration began to consider the inevitability of opening its market to outside. With the increase of internationalism, a certain degree of idealization of sŏnjin’guk occurred. The connotation of the concept sŏnjin’guk as an advanced being in the field of industry became broadened to be somewhat applicable to other fields beyond industry. However, as the dominant national identity in the 1980s was one of the NICs, the group of sŏnjin’guk was basically considered as having different interests from Korea’s on the international stage. From this position, various challenges to and criticisms of sŏnjin’guk were made.

This chapter has argued that the 1990s witnessed the intensification of Eurocentric universalism in the discourse of sŏnjin’guk as the Korean developmental regime actively adopted the global discourse of neoliberalism. Under the slogans of “shin han’guk ch’angjo” and “segyehwa,” the Kim Young-Sam administration vigorously promoted the acceptance of “global standard” as the way to become sŏnjin’guk. Setting sŏnjin’guk as a kind of ideal model, the developmental regime boosted the reformation of South Korea in virtually every field. In this process, the concept of sŏnjin’guk got far idealized and became abstract, and a hierarchy between South Korea and sŏnjin’guk became naturalized to some extent.

In the 2000s, the discourse of sŏnjin’guk was much appropriated by the promoters of neoliberal transformation. Amidst the global neoliberal trend, mainstream conservative voices argued for a need for neoliberal transformation as the way to increase national competitiveness and to, ultimately, achieve sŏnjin’guk. The basic
assumptions and ideas of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, which were inherited from the 1990s, became far more naturalized and widely taken for granted. Under the Lee Myung-Bak administration, the discourse of sŏnjin’guk was frequently utilized under the slogan of “sŏnjinhwa.”

The discourse has changed its primary connotations and implications reflecting specific historical conditions, and its formation and transformation have been contingent upon the particularities of Korean developmental experiences. Given that the basic assumptions and characteristics of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk are historically constructed in the South Korean developmental process, its historicity and constructiveness should be well recognized. In this respect, the discourse’s central concepts such as sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk are to be understood as historical constructs reflecting South Koreans’ values, aspirations, and worldviews. The vigorous pursuit of sŏnjin’guk, based upon national self identities such as “on the threshold of the group of sŏnjin’guk,” should be understood as reflecting the particularities of South Koreans’ value systems that have been historically constructed in their developmental process. Thus, this study has challenged the “taken-for-grantedness” of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk and reminded its historicity and constructiveness. I believe that the reconstruction of the concept of sŏnjin’guk, which goes beyond the Eurocentric developmental framework and values the diversity of humanity, would be possible by problematizing and historicizing the currently taken-for-granted discursive system.
CHAPTER 4

CHALLENGES TO THE DISCOURSE OF SŎNJIN’GUK

The discourse of sŏnjin’guk is a hegemonic discourse. Its assumptions and characteristics reflect developmentalists’ hegemony, which is based upon wide consent from the general public to the extent that the achievement of sŏnjin’guk has historically been set as an urgent national goal. The perceptual frameworks of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk have been so naturally accepted that its historicity associated with the formation and transformation of the Korean and global developmental regime is rarely recognized. Hence, various developmental agenda built under the cause of achieving sŏnjin’guk are not necessarily regarded as serving for the interests of developmentalists but for the interests of the whole country.

The Gramscian notion of “historical bloc” is contingent basically upon the conjuncture of intellectual leadership and material conditions.47 In this regard, Cox (1996:97) suggests a concept of “historical structure,” that is, “a particular combination of thought patterns, material conditions, and human institutions which has a certain coherence among its elements.” In this view, the three categories of forces interact cooperatively to configure a stable structure of social relations. An important assumption underlying those concepts is that certain social relations and structures are historical, that is, subject to change according to the transition of historical

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47 As for Gramsci’s concept of “historical bloc,” Forgacs (1988:424) notes that it is “the dialectical unity of base and superstructure, of theory and practice, of intellectuals and masses (and not, as is sometimes mistakenly asserted, simply an alliance of social forces).”
circumstances. In this respect, hegemonic relations are in no way constant, but a sort of process of responding to continuous challenges from counter-hegemonic groups.

As a system of ideas, which has contributed to the construction of a historical structure characterized by its developmental proposition, the discourse of $s\'o\!n\!j\!i\!n\!'g\!u\!k$ is well subject to challenges and contestations. The formation and transformation of discourse are, in fact, processes of responding to various circumstantial changes and challenges from other discourses. The discourse of $s\'o\!n\!j\!i\!n\!'g\!u\!k$ has been contested by other interpretive frameworks even though the strengths of contestations have not been so noticeable. Mainly reflecting the interests of the developmental regime, the discourse of $s\'o\!n\!j\!i\!n\!'g\!u\!k$ has been challenged by various social forces relatively marginalized and oppressed in the process of South Korea’s rapid economic development. Many of the discursive challenges are related to the criticisms of growth-centered developmentalism.

This chapter aims to examine challenges to the basic assumptions and ideas of the discourse of $s\'o\!n\!j\!i\!n\!'g\!u\!k$. The main research question is: “how do various social, economic, and cultural counter-hegemonic groups understand, criticize, and challenge the discourse of $s\'o\!n\!j\!i\!n\!'g\!u\!k$?” To answer this, it investigates some notable counter-hegemonic social forces in South Korea, such as laborers, peasants, civic groups, and Confucian scholars. The first three groups in particular have formed central social forces leading progressive social and political economic movements, with positions opposing to mainstream conservative developmental alliances. Methodologically, I investigate organizations and people representing those forces. For laborers, I have focused on two representative labor unions: $ch\!u\!n\!'g\!u\!k\! m\!i\!n\!j\!u\! \!n\!o\!d\!o\!n\!j\!o\!h\!a\!b$
ch’ongyŏnmaeng (Korean Federation of Trade Unions; minju noch’ong hereafter) and han’guk nodongjohab ch’ongyŏnmaeng (Federation of Korean Trade Unions; han’guk noch’ong hereafter). For farmers, I have chosen chŏn’guk nongminwhoe ch’ongyŏnmaeng (National Association of Farmers’ Meetings; chŏnnong hereafter) and kat’ollik nongminwhoe (Catholic Farmers’ Association; kanong hereafter). For civic groups, I have selected ch’amyŏ yŏndaes (People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy) and hwan’gyŏng undong yŏnhab (Korean Federation for Environmental Movement; hwan’gyŏng yŏnhab hereafter). And for Confucians, I have picked two professors teaching Confucianism at Sungkyunkwan University.

In a situation where the discourse of sŏnjin’guk enjoys its stable hegemony, competitive and alternative interpretive frameworks have not notably appeared in the public sphere. Therefore, analyzing those groups’ public archives, such as documents, brochures, and public announcements, would be less fruitful in examining the differences between mainstream and challenging ideas regarding the discourse of sŏnjin’guk. Thus, I have decided to interview representative individuals from each organization. I have not assumed that those individuals’ opinions “represent” those of the organizations, but that they more or less “reflect” the organizations’ stance. In the interviews, I have focused on differences and similarities between the interviewees’ understandings of the discourse and mainstream ones. I have interviewed one or two from each organization depending on the situation, which makes nine interviewees total: two from minju noch’ong; one from han’guk noch’ong, chŏnnong, kanong, ch’amyŏ yŏndaes, and hwan’gyŏng yŏnhab each; and two Confucian scholars. Interviews took
place from September to November in 2009, and most of them lasted for about two to three hours. I have used the semi-structured interview technique.

This chapter is organized in six substantive sections. The first section examines general patterns of challenges to the basic assumptions and characteristics of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk. The second and third sections respectively analyze challenges to the concepts of sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk. The fourth section focuses on the interviewees’ understandings of historical background underlying the distinction between sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk. The fifth section explores contestations over South Korea’s national identity and the sŏnjinhwa (achieving sŏnjin or achieving advancement) project. And the last section looks into resistances to the Eurocentric implications of the discourse.

THE GROUNDS OF CHALLENGE

The basic concepts and assumptions of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk are differently interpreted and challenged in a variety of ways. As for the concepts of sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk, some interviewees do not admit the appropriateness of the classification and directly challenge them with alternative terms and concepts. They tend to insist that those concepts are classified by one-sided criteria to make an unjust hierarchy out of diversity. They argue that those concepts idealize countries categorized as sŏnjin’guk, masking their historical wrongdoings to human beings as well as nature. For instance,
laborers criticize those concepts for obscuring power relations among countries in the exploitative world capitalist order.

Others contest the concepts of*sŏnjin’guk* and *hujin’guk* with different interpretations, while maintaining their use. For them, the connotations of those concepts are differently interpreted from mainstream ones. Thus, instead of discarding the classificatory system of *sŏnjin’guk* and *hujin’guk*, they show an inclination to challenge it by differently designating countries in alternative interpretive frameworks. On the basis of the positive connotation of *sŏnjin’guk* and negative one of *hujin’guk*, they pay attention to a discrepancy between the idealized images of *sŏnjin’guk* and the negative realities of some countries typically designated as such. Against different criteria, such as welfare system or eco-friendliness, some advanced capitalist countries such as the U.S. become a kind of *hujin’guk*.

In general, the authority of the discourse of *sŏnjin’guk* turns into far weak with the interviewees. Its central concepts have different meanings to those people and its basic ways of representing the world are criticized in a variety of ways. From the interviewees’ arguments are some grounds manifest, upon which challenges to the discourse of *sŏnjin’guk* stand. Based upon their arguments, I distinguish the following ten grounds of criticism for analytical purpose.

First, the classificatory system of the discourse prioritizes economic criteria, without taking into account other important aspects of society, e.g., mental richness, social and cultural aspects, and so forth. Second, the discourse virtually obscures diversity among societies by ignoring their unique historical characteristics and merits.
Third, the discourse reflects Eurocentric worldviews, marginalizing various forms of living in non-Western societies. Fourth, the discourse implies that the rich is good regardless of various undesirable conditions associated with it, such as environmental damage, exploitation of the earth and people, etc. Fifth, it interrupts the mutual understanding and learning of various societies, creating a hierarchy according to some limited criteria.

Sixth, the classification system does not take into account the “quality” of economic aspects, such as the sustainability of the economy. Seventh, the discourse idealizes excessively consumptive societies. Eighth, it obscures the nature of domination-subordination relationship among countries, presenting this as a kind of temporal one. Ninth, the discourse promotes distorted worldviews, such as racial prejudice, by implying a Eurocentric hierarchy between superior “white countries” and inferior “non-white countries.” And last, the discourse still represents a “modern” worldview, when the world is moving towards postmodern ones.

CHALLENGES TO THE CONCEPT OF SŎNJIN’GUK

The concept of sŏnjin’guk, reflecting South Korea’s mainstream national values and visions, is one of the most contested notions in the discourse of sŏnjin’guk. In regard to the ways of transforming the country, it becomes a site where various values and visions compete and struggle with one another. Grounded upon diverse interpretive
frameworks, the respondents criticize and resist the notion of sŏnjin’guk promoted by mainstream social forces. Some present alternative notions based upon different interpretations of the world, while others show a sort of deconstructive positions.

In understanding the world political-economic order, respondents from minju noch’ong tend to emphasize power inequalities in the capitalist world order, showing an inclination towards Marxist ideas. Thus, for them, the discourse of sŏnjin’guk does not much take into account these asymmetrical power relations, reflecting powerful countries’ ideology. As for the epistemological ground of the concept of sŏnjin’guk, a respondent argues that “the distinction between sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk philosophically shows a convergence tendency” and that “it is a notion that someone has temporally gone first with others following it.” For him, the discourse of sŏnjin’guk transforms a matter of power difference into that of temporal difference. Another respondent also criticizes the notion of sŏnjin’guk based upon the critique of modern epistemology. He says that:

The epistemology that appeared with modern enlightenment thought supposes that time runs from the beginning to the end, according to which human history has developed. Thus, it is the modern perception of history that those going ahead are to enlighten those behind in the time line. But I doubt the validity of this historical view and think that the distinctions according to this historical view have created a lot of misfortunes in humanity. For example, it played a role in giving justification to oppressions, plunders, and wars, as shown in the oppressions of Native Americans, and to the view that they were barbarians to be dominated. I think [the distinction between sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk] is based on this kind of epistemology and thus should be overcome.

These laborer respondents provide alternative interpretive frameworks of the world, which take into account domination-subordination relationships among countries,
while maintaining a sort of dualistic worldviews. In this regard, one suggests a way of classifying countries into the First World (che 1 segye) and the Third World (che 3 segye), and the other prefers to categorize them into the imperial country (chegukjuŭi) and the colonized country (sikminji). In distinguishing between the First and Third Worlds, the respondent focuses on the flow of economic profit in the capitalist world order, echoing critical political economic theories such as dependency theory and world systems theory (Frank 1989 [1966]; Arrighi and Silver 1999; Wallerstein 2004). In this perspective, some countries are characterized as having a certain degree of economic and political powers to exploit profit from other countries. Unequal socio-economic conditions between countries are thus to be understood in “relations,” rather than in temporal or sequential ways as are implied by the concepts of sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk.

With regard to the characteristics of the First World, the respondent mentions that:

The First World is the countries that monopolize political and military hegemony. [ . . . ] They show clear dominance politically and militarily, and have a capacity of putting pressure on the Third World or non-First World countries, with political and military powers.

This statement implies that power is embedded in the relationship between the two worlds and some are in a dominating and exploitative position at the expense of others. In this regard, he insists that “the First World refers to the countries at the center, which facilitate the economic exploitation of the Third World through various institutions such as the IMF and the WTO.”
The respondent, however, does not homogenize the First World. Rather, he recognizes differences among First World countries in certain aspects. In distinguishing the internal political economic variations of the First World between social democratic models and market-oriented ones, the respondent expresses his preference of the former to the latter. In this regard, he mentions that:

I think there are wide variations within the First World, as we talk about differences between the First World, developing country, and the Third World. It can, of course, be generally admitted that the First World has relatively advanced formal democracy, given a lot of military revolutions and coups occurring in Africa. However, social welfare system and other institutional forms related to people’s quality of life are different among them. For example, Japan, the U.S., and Europe are different, and within Europe are clear differences between Scandinavian countries with strong social democracy movement and other countries. There are also differences in democracy in terms of contents. [. . .] In our struggle for social insurance and pension, the U.S. appears as an example of country that we should not resemble. So, I would like to say that there are variations [among First World countries].

Focusing on unequal power relations in the world political economy, this respondent considers economic scale and political power, rather than per capita income, as important criteria for dividing the two worlds. Thus, he tends to count those with big GDP scale as the First World, such as the U.S., Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Canada, and Australia. In this view, those countries typically referred to as sŏnjin’guk are differently termed and represented in a different framework. It is interesting to note that he considers China, which is typically regarded as hujin’guk in the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, as being close to the First World. He picks up the U.S. as the most typical First World country in the sense that it is “at the peak of exploiting various profits from the Third World.”
The other respondent also employs a similar interpretive framework. He focuses on unequal power relations between imperial and colonized countries. As for classificatory criteria, he emphasizes the “mode of production system.” With regard to the characteristics of imperial country, he argues that:

Basically, it is said that the highest stage of capitalism is imperialism, but, in fact, it is financial capital. So, we can say that financial capital is a common trait [of imperialism]. Excessively formed financial capital, such as floating funds and liquid funds, seeks for investment places in expanding their territory, such as colony, laborers, inside of human beings, women, or race, which appears as colony in terms of nation.

While considering that the imperial country looks relatively more mature and stable, he thinks that many negative social and political economic aspects of it are masked by its delicate control mechanisms. For him, people in the imperial country are not free from the exploitative nature of financial capital associated with various ideologies and cultural systems. With regard to this, he states that:

As financial capital has to continuously seek for the place to realize its profit, it creates social, political, and cultural ideologies. They can be patriarchy or racism in terms of culture. The U.S. has tactfully hidden racism, but racism is not just a problem between blacks and whites. It could be educational or regional sectarianism, and could be the Seoul National University centrum in the case of Korea. They are continuously reproduced in these forms in terms of ideology and discourse.

As for the political system of the imperial country, he argues that:

In terms of democracy, it may be hard to say that it is developing toward true democracy. [. . .] In fact, I doubt if it is a progress when the system comes to make individuals voluntarily obey it by internalizing oppressive apparatuses. In some aspects, it may be a progress as it is not visible oppression, but in other aspects, it is the
realization of ruling ideology based on the internalization of advanced domination mechanism.

In this interpretive framework, countries typically regarded as sŏnjin’guk are alternatively represented as imperial countries. As are perceived as such, their social systems appear somewhat differently from the idealized images of sŏnjin’guk, with many negative aspects within themselves. Furthermore, imperial countries are considered as having committed a lot of mistakes in global history. In regard to the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, this respondent points out that the term sŏnjin’guk tends to mask those mistakes, and that there is a discrepancy between the ideal image of sŏnjin’guk and their historical exploitative behaviors. As for this, he argues that:

In common sense, sŏnjin’guk refers to Western European countries, such as Germany, but Nazism or holocaust occurred in countries called as sŏnjin’guk. They might have developed material civilization, but, given such things as the exploitation of nature and environmental pollution, it can not necessarily be said as good, depending on criteria. I do not deny material affluence and prosperity, and these are important in themselves. But, when we consider whether these are contributing to the virtuous circle of the globe, it is hard to see those countries as sŏnjin’guk.

Given the positive connotation of the term sŏnjin’guk, this respondent basically considers that there is no country deserving such term yet. In this sense, those referred to as sŏnjin’guk are, in fact, imperial countries whose relative material affluences are historically based upon the exploitation of people and nature. For this respondent, the difference in living conditions between the imperial and colonized countries is the result of the unequal accumulation of capital between the exploiting and the exploited. In this regard, he says that:
In the case of imperial countries, all people get the benefit. Obtaining sufficient profit from colonies, they can give a lot of welfare and wages to their laborers and marginalized classes. In terms of the labor-capital relationship within the imperial country, laborers are in a kind of accomplice relationship with capital. From capitalists’ perspective, they buy off laborers. Thus, within the imperial country, conflicts may not be intense. However, in colony, people are generally very poor even though some ruling classes may be rich.

Unlike the respondents from *minju noch’ong*, which is considered as a more radical labor union, the respondent from *han’guk noch’ong* does not show strong Marxist bearings in his ideas. His criticism of the mainstream way of conceptualizing *sŏnjin’guk* mainly lies in its overemphasis on the averaged income level. Considering that there are various aspects to consider in evaluating a society, he distinguishes “true *sŏnjin’guk*” from *sŏnjin’guk* usually appearing in popular discourses. For him, social values, rather than economic values, are more important in evaluating society. In this regard, he mentions that “[*sŏnjin’guk*] should not be a society in which such values as human right, solidarity, and friendship are put behind as too much focus is put on the endless expansion of profit and capital.”

While maintaining the concept of *sŏnjin’guk*, this respondent basically considers that it should be redefined as a desirable society by more diverse criteria. In this way, he sets a kind of ideal concept of *sŏnjin’guk*, and suspects if the countries typically referred to as *sŏnjin’guk* truly match the ideal connotation of the term *sŏnjin’guk*. For him, Scandinavian countries are close models to *sŏnjin’guk* in the empirical world, such as Norway, as they have quite good labor and welfare systems. In this respect, he does not value U.S. social systems much, which he thinks is relatively weak in distributive aspects. By his criteria, the U.S. is rather a powerful country than *sŏnjin’guk*. 
The respondent from *kanong* strongly reflects his organization’s interests in defining *sŏnjin 'guk* by putting priority on agricultural aspects, such as the degree of food self-support. He also tries to redefine it in a different definitive framework reflecting his group interests. In this framework, the conventional notion of *sŏnjin 'guk* does not represent truly important aspects of society. For him, a country that does not value agricultural sustainability is not *sŏnjin 'guk* no matter how its income level is high. In this sense, this respondent also strongly criticizes the economically biased concept of *sŏnjin 'guk*, and presents an agro-centered perspective in defining it. As for this, he says that:

I doubt if we can say that South Korea is *sŏnjin 'guk* merely based on its economic scale when it ignores agriculture. Many *sŏnjin 'guk* countries in the world have more than 100 percent of food self-support [. . .].

He advocates collective values that are associated with traditional agricultural societies. In this respect, he argues for the importance of non-economic aspects in defining *sŏnjin 'guk*, such as social equality, harmony, and welfare system. In his interpretive framework, it is regrettable that some high-income countries without desirable social systems are idealized under the name of *sŏnjin 'guk*. Therefore, for him, certain countries typically referred to as *sŏnjin 'guk*, such as the U.S., the U.K., and Japan, are not regarded as desirable *sŏnjin 'guk*, regardless of their economic scales. In this regard, he says that:
Many people may say the U.S. and Japan are sŏnjin ‘guk, but I wouldn’t agree to that. No matter how they control the world economy, the gap between the rich and the poor is serious. In the case of the U.S., there are many homeless people and the health care system has collapsed [. . .]. Yet, I think European countries have good welfare systems in their ways. A true sŏnjin society is one that tries to eliminate inequality and to ameliorate the problems of education, health care, and housing. I think it is dangerous and meaningless to consider sŏnjin ‘guk or sŏnjinhwaw with only the criterion of economic scale, such as American-, Japanese-, and British-styles, in which the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

In relation to this, this respondent puts stress on the importance of the contextual understanding of society. He points out that the conditions for sŏnjin ‘guk cannot be universal and uni-dimensional, but different and diverse from society to society. He emphasizes that each society should make efforts to construct its own sustainable model, reflecting its historical and cultural backgrounds. Thus, the concept of sŏnjin ‘guk is not what is to be judged by a unilateral yardstick. In this regard, he insists that any country can be regarded as sŏnjin ‘guk insofar as it “has high income; has escaped from absolute poverty; is comfortable to live; and has institutional systems supporting these.” This is quite a departure from dominant notions that tend to set a certain type of politico-economic systems as conditions for sŏnjin ‘guk, such as liberal democracy and market economy. With regard to this, he mentions that:

Every country has its own culture, tradition, and history, as is with Arab countries, which should be respected. It is inappropriate to say that it is hujin ‘guk and unacceptable because it is not U.S.-style. Arab countries all have their own diverse cultures, peoples, and histories, and we should respect these. It is inappropriate to say that they are hujin ‘guk as they are different from our perspective.
In his framework, South Korea’s identity becomes quite negative. Above all, it is hard to be regarded as sŏnjin’guk since it has disregarded the traditional value of agriculture in its rapid modernization process, resulting in the low level of food self-support. He argues that the uncertainty of agricultural situation weakens the sustainability of economic growth. He also disputes the assumption that South Korea has moved toward the status of sŏnjin’guk in a linear way from hujin’guk. For him, the direction of social change is undetermined, and the notion of temporal progress from hujin’guk to sŏnjin’guk is a myth. In this regard, he maintains that “countries like North Korea and the Philippines can be our future instead of the past.” Considering South Korea’s weak sustainability, he adds that “the idea that we are heading toward sŏnjin’guk is quite dangerous.”

The respondent from chŏnnong shows a sort of deconstructive perspective, paying attention to the diversity of the world. A big problem of the categorization of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, for her, is that it tends to evaluate a country by measuring the very limited aspect of it, e.g., economic one, with a single-dimensional yardstick. She argues that this is likely to lose, rather than catch, the true character of country. In this respect, she sees no usefulness in categorizing various countries into the dualistic scheme of sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk. She says that:

I don’t understand classifying sŏnjin’guk, chungjin’guk, and hujin’guk according to merely economic indices, ignoring various traits unique to each country. There are aspects that are not consented [regarding the classification], and I doubt if it is necessary to make categories like that.
She adds that:

I think it is quite problematic to move the world with the unilateral model. In this way, one cannot learn from each other. For a materially affluent country, spiritually affluent countries can bring about cultural richness. There are differences, and it is problematic to homogenize those aspects into one.

The concept of sŏnjin’guk is also criticized as idealizing the social systems of certain countries categorized as such. In this regard, she points out that the term sŏnjin’guk tends to be used as a blanket term masking various problems virtually appearing in countries designated as sŏnjin’guk. Being designated as such, a country is idealized and assumed as a role model to other countries. As for this, she mentions that “on becoming sŏnjin’guk, it is regarded as a model and a correct answer. Thus, even if the U.S. has a lot of racism and human right abuses, they are masked under the name of sŏnjin’guk.”

The perspective of the respondent from ch’amyŏ yŏndae is somewhat similar to that of the respondent from chŏnnong in the sense that both show a sort of deconstructive attitude towards the concept of sŏnjin’guk. Considering the diversity of the world, she also refuses to see any usefulness in classifying countries into sŏnjin’guk or hujin’guk. She expresses strong resistance to the ways of creating a hierarchy among countries according to economic and military powers. Besides, the concept of sŏnjin’guk, for her, is too ambiguous and subjective to have significant usefulness as its definition becomes different from person to person. In regard to this, she insists that:
I don’t know with what criteria they distinguish sŏnjin’guk, chungjin’guk, and hujin’guk in general, but it seems that the government uses it frequently. I don’t agree to it because criteria are ambiguous and it tends to just refer to economically and militarily powerful countries in the West. It can be a discourse in some ways. There seem to be underlying implications that economically prosperous and militarily strong countries are to be referred to as sŏnjin’guk.

Putting stress on the diversity of societies, she adds that:

So, it is assumed that we are always a following country. [...] Each country may have its own merits to boast, so it may be inappropriate to refer virtually to the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council as sŏnjin’guk, without considering diversity.

It is interesting to see that this respondent thinks that the term sŏnjin’guk virtually means the U.N. Security Council members, which is quite an untypical way of perceiving sŏnjin’guk. In this perception, such high-income countries as Scandinavian countries and Japan, which are typically categorized as sŏnjin’guk, are not designated as such. For her, the term sŏnjin’guk virtually refers to powerful countries, which do not include small European countries. That is to say, sŏnjin’guk is an idealized term for powerful countries.

In criticizing the concept of sŏnjin’guk, she emphasizes the importance of such values as peace, equality, solidarity, and justice at the national and international levels. In this respect, she doubts how much effort powerful countries make to devote to those important values around the world. Thus, for her, some powerful countries should not be designated with the beautified image of sŏnjin’guk. In this regard, she states that:
Western countries, which South Korea tries to resemble, are very *hujin’guk* in some aspects. As in the case of U.S. invasion of Iraq, for instance, they cannot control such a thing even though it is said that the so-called democracy is established institutionally and procedurally. [...] In those aspects, it is very *hujin’guk* in terms of the use of the military and the deployment of the military abroad. It is a very dangerous country in terms of doctrine, and is very backward in terms of healthcare and welfare sectors.

The respondent from *hwan ’gyǒng yǒnhab* also shows a deconstructive attitude towards the concept of *sǒnjin’guk*, valuing the sustainability of the earth. At the same time, she presents an alternative way of classifying countries. She basically considers that the categorization of *sǒnjin’guk* and *hujin’guk* is a way of distinguishing between the good and the bad according to the degree of wealth. For her, the accumulation of wealth is deeply related to consumptive lifestyle, which is not free but requires cost from people as well as nature. She points out that the conventional ways of classifying *sǒnjin’guk* and *hujin’guk* is highly uni-dimensional in the sense that they do not take into account various important aspects in the relationship between people and nature, such as the exploitation of the earth and people, the environmental impact, and the sustainability of lifestyle. Furthermore, she argues, they imply that the rich is good and the poor is bad. As an environment activist, she emphasizes that the conventional ways of classifying countries into *sǒnjin’guk* or *hujin’guk* promote harmful effects on the world. Questioning the sustainability of rich countries’ ways of life, she argues that:

> [If *sǒnjin’guk* is regarded as a model,] it makes people consume like those in *sǒnjin’guk* and pursue that kind of society. I think this makes people have a desire of false image, and if so, the earth would collapse since the entire world has to live like that.
In this regard, she is concerned about that the environmentally unfriendly ways of life are romanticized as a universal vision of the world under the name of sŏnjin’guk. She points out that “as long as we use the term sŏnjin, that is, going ahead, it is seen as a goal for us to reach.” In relation to this, she criticizes that the concept of sŏnjin’guk puts focus merely on economic dimension, such as per capita income, ignoring diverse aspects of society. For her, the concepts of sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk rather mask the diversity of society, and thus are not quite useful in understanding it. In this regard, she mentions that:

As for indices, I don’t think we have to distinguish countries according to GDP. There can be diverse criteria, such as happiness index, the index for natural resources, or that for human resources. There can be diverse regional classifications according to those. Thus, I think the current way of classification is problematic because it distinguishes countries according to how much they are industrialized or how much their per capita incomes are.

In those respects, she suggests an alternative classificatory way of countries, which takes into account the rich’s responsibility for environmental damages. According to this, she distinguishes between the responsible country (ch’aegim kukga) and the victim country (p’ihae kukga). These new concepts put focus on the responsibility of the rich country for the damages to people and nature. In this regard, she insists that rich countries have two main responsibilities: one is the responsibility of helping restore the damages of victimized people and the environment; and the other is the responsibility of reducing their consumption level and adjusting to a sustainable way of life. In this respect, her criticism of the concept of sŏnjin’guk does not remain a mere...
criticism, but leads to an alternative model of evaluating societies or countries. In this regard, she states that:

On the contrary, I would prefer to distinguish between the countries with much responsibility, which exploited more and used the earth more and thus have to pay more taxes, and the countries that need to be taken care of.

In relation to this, she goes on to say that:

As a certain model of overconsumption and enormous desire, which uses much and is quite speedy, is termed as sŏnjin’guk, people pursue it, rather than taking care of their environment. Then, I think the classification system should be changed. An alternative is the distinction between ANNEX 1 group and others in the Climatic Change Convention. I think this is useful because ANNEX 1 group means the countries that have to cut more as they are historically more responsible. This kind of distinction is necessary. I think it is appropriate to distinguish them in a way to give them responsibility for their destructions and exploitations as they started first.

As for the characteristics of the responsible country, she mentions that:

For example, there are three main types: the countries that caused wars; the countries that did a lot of imperial exploitations, creating many colonies; and, the countries that consumed lots of energy using a lot of natural resources.

Her examples of the responsible country include the U.S., Japan, Germany, France, Spain, and Britain. It is interesting to see that these countries, which are likely to be idealized in the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, are somewhat negatively represented in terms of their relationships with the environment and other countries. In particular, she harshly criticizes the U.S., the most responsible country, saying that:
The U.S. is not quite a model country in terms of such aspects as energy consumption. It seems that democracy is developed in terms of form but not in terms of contents. Welfare is not developed, and nor are the education system, human right situation, and energy consumption exploiting the earth. It doesn’t seem that any one thing [of the U.S.] can be a model.

Confucian scholars show civilizational approaches to the concept of sŏnjin’guk. They tend to interpret it in terms of the limitation of modern civilization and to suggest alternative notions of it based upon Confucian thoughts. By defining it in different paradigms of civilization, they try to go beyond the conventional modern concept of sŏnjin’guk. In regard to this, a respondent argues that the current categorization of sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk is useful only in terms of the paradigm of modern civilization led by the West. For him, modern civilization is characterized as developments of science, democracy, and capitalism. In this context, he argues that one can distinguish countries leading the characteristics of modern civilization, from those following or lagging behind them. In this regard, he says that:

[As for the distinction between sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk,] I agree, but just on the conditions of the so-called modern civilization. Modern civilization is discussed in terms of the developments of science, democracy, and capitalism, which are pursued by Western civilization. The development of capitalism or modern civilization is that of human-centered civilization. In the cultural atmosphere, in which nature is thought to be used for the benefit of human beings, the countries that faithfully pursue this trend of civilization are sŏnjin’guk, and those which are not faithful to that civilization are hujin’guk. Countries such as South Korea, which has been diligently catching up with that civilization as a model, are kaebal-dosang-guk.

However, he argues that the modern paradigm is coming to an end, witnessing its limitations mainly in terms of the environment and community. According to him,
modern civilization is a “human-centered and nature-destroying civilization.” Thus, the current classification system has come to be no longer useful. He emphasizes that it is time to consider a new version of sŏnjin’guk that is suitable to the upcoming postmodern world. In this sense, the status of sŏnjin’guk in the new paradigm is open to every country. As for the conditions for sŏnjin’guk in the new paradigm, he states that:

Politically and socially, it is urgent to restore communalism from extreme individualism. Thus, it is important to establish a society based on moral social customs, instead of a legal society, in which people can trust one another.

In relation to this, he goes on to say that:

It is important that to what extent individual and communal values can be harmonized each other. For instance, it would raise a chance to become sŏnjin’guk to preoccupy things in terms of how much it is hybrid, and how much one can secure resources while protecting the environment, departing from the conventional notion that it is okay to drill oil and sell gasoline for cars.

As for the urgent things that sŏnjin’guk of the modern paradigm should do for the new paradigm, he insists that:

The most urgent problem for sŏnjin’guk is whether they can establish environment-friendly and truly equal societies, recovering from the conditions they have made to become sŏnjin’guk so far, most important of which are the damages to the environment and the exploitative behaviors against hujin’guk.

His criticism of modernity is reflected in his negative view on U.S. social systems, which are considered as a typical example of modern civilization. For him, the
contemporary status of the U.S. is far short of meeting the expectations of new postmodern civilization. Moreover, he thinks that it still sticks to the conventional notion of modernity, and does not quite realize its weaknesses in terms of new civilizational frameworks. In this respect, the U.S. is no longer sŏnjin’guk for him. As for this, he states that:

Above all, the U.S. has a big problem in its social security system, and its problem of illegal immigrants, who occupy the bottom part of the country, is very serious. It shows an example of gesellschaft, which excessively pursues only individuals’ interests, without communal constraint and shared morality, as is seen in the recent problem in the financial system. It is also an example of making the world conflictive with its power, so the U.S. can no longer be sŏnjin’guk.

The other Confucian respondent’s perspective is also based upon the criticism of the modern Eurocentric interpretive framework. This respondent shows a similarity with the above Confucian scholar in terms of envisioning a postmodern worldview. Regarding the modern worldview, he argues that:

I’m continuously saying that the preexisting concepts of sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk should be changed. The previous concept of sŏnjin’guk is that which takes modernity as universal value, while what we are to present is the concept of sŏnjin based on the framework of postmodernity. Even if we can admit the value of such things as human right and equality, the general framework of modernity has reached the limit. [. . .] In its worldview, the mainstream is the mechanical worldview, or physical and value-free attitudes toward nature. Thus, it replaces god and nature with the absolutized human being. In order to absolutize the human being himself (or herself), they have had to create absolute reason, and have made the structure of utopia leading from alpha to omega. But, now, I think the concepts of sŏnjinhwa or sŏnjin munhwa (culture) based on those perceptions are coming to an end and being fragmented.
He also points out that the hierarchy between sŏnjin 'guk and hujin 'guk, basically, reflects Eurocentric philosophy:

The concept of sŏnjin itself is created by them [the West] and successfully inculcated to the people of the world. For example, such a person as Hegel employed that kind of dichotomous thought and it has been inherited from generation to generation in Western tradition. They have always distinguished us from others [. . .].

For him, true sŏnjin 'guk should promote the value of harmony among people, and between people and nature. In this regard, he suggests a need for “new frame-making between [the human] and the universe.” He emphasizes that, in the new framework, one’s spirit should be restored to be harmonized with the spirit of the universe. He expects a great role of Confucianism in envisioning a postmodern world. In this sense, South Korea, which maintains lots of Confucian cultural heritages, is considered as having a big potential of contributing to the new world. In comparison, he thinks that the U.S. has many weaknesses in terms of the ability of maintaining spiritual harmony with the universe. In this sense, his perception of U.S. social systems is quite negative. He states that:

The U.S. looks like a cut above us. It can be said that such aspects as established orders are a step above, but I don’t think it is the essence. I don’t think it is an appearance of true sŏnjin. This is because its civilization is established on the massacre of 80 million or 100 million Native Americans, and so are the thoughts and grounds upon which the civilization is to be established. When we think of the possibility of making great harmony, compensating for all of those aspects, they may naturally have to need 500 times more efforts than us. I think it is a society maintained by gun and power, but not the one that guarantees human right, freedom, and equality that we anticipate. However, it looks like a high-level society on the surface because it has powerful laws and enforces them very strictly. On the contrary, law and compassion are mixed in our
society, which can be seen as a disorder by their perspective, but it may not be a disorder in reality.

CHALLENGES TO THE CONCEPT OF HUJIN’GUK

With regard to differentiation between the colonial and colonized worlds in the “age of empire,” Hobsbawm (1987:16) observes that we are dealing with “two sectors combined together into one global system: the developed and the lagging, the dominant and the dependent, the rich and the poor.” Even though this distinction explains some aspects of global political economic order, he points out its simplicity, saying that:

Even this description is misleading. While the (smaller) first world, in spite of its considerable internal disparities, was united by history and as the common bearer of capitalist development, the (much larger) second world was united by nothing except its relations with, that is to say its potential or actual dependency on, the first. (Hobsbawm 1987:16)

In this statement, Hobsbawm raises a question of the representation of reality. As for the dichotomy of the first and second worlds, he points out that it tends to disregard the significant level of internal variation within each world, especially within the “much larger” second world.

In this regard, the concept of hujin ’guk is a blanket term homogenizing various countries into a single category. In this sense, some respondents do not see much usefulness in such a concept as hujin ’guk. Given the diversity of the world, they tend to argue that reality is too complicated to be contained in such a blanket term. In contrast,
some other respondents recognize the usefulness of a concept representing marginalized countries in the contemporary world order.

The respondents from minju noch’ong tend to criticize the concept of hujin’guk with different dichotomous interpretive frameworks of the world, e.g., the First and the Third Worlds, or the imperial and colonized countries. They generally consider that the First World (or imperial country) has relatively more desirable conditions for human life, compared with the Third World (or colonized country). In this respect, they do not show much resistance to the ways of dichotomously representing the world. However, their understandings of the nature of the dichotomous world are different from the conventional ideas of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk. In this regard, a respondent says that “anyway, it is a clear experiential reality that poverty and starvation are concentrated in [the Third World].” As for the Third World’s political situation, he mentions that “prolonged one-man rule, unstable domestic political situation, and the overthrow of formal democratic institutions are [the political characteristics of the Third World].” With regard to its social conditions, he insists that:

It is also true in terms of phenomena that their consciousness is not awake. For example, education system is not established. It is clear that the education level is not high in terms of the infrastructure driving an industrial development, of which education is important for human infrastructure.

The Third World’s undesirable situations, however, are interpreted in the context of unequal power relations within the world political economic order. As for the main causes of them, he pays attention to external and structural factors, rather than
internal ones. He blames the capitalist world’s systematic problem for the differentiation of the two worlds. With regard to the Third World’s conditions, he argues that:

That may ultimately be because of the domination-subordination relationship within the world system. A certain country must have budget and capacity to invest in material or human infrastructures, but the domination-subordination relationship is making a difficult circumstance for it.

Yet, this respondent does not see the Third World as helpless entity as is implied by the notion of hujin’guk. Rather, he considers that it has great potential to overcome the contradiction of the capitalist world system. In this regard, he states that:

We are paying attention to the continuous movements occurring in the Third World to escape from the global domination-subordination relationship. For example, we are getting reports that the socialist governments in such Latin American countries as Venezuela, Brazil, and Cuba are employing policies for equality and social welfare, regardless of the changes of power. Thus, we are seeking for social and international alliance with them.

The respondent from han’guk noch’ong considers hujin’guk as countries in economically, socially, and politically undesirable conditions. As for the characteristics of hujin’guk, he states that “the food problem is serious, and the economic aspect and other aspects such as human right are not going along well.” As for an example of hujin’guk, he has picked up North Korea without hesitation. In this respect, his understanding of hujin’guk as undesirable countries is somewhat similar to mainstream ideas. However, he disputes conventional notions, which tend to consider hujin’guk as
responsible for its own misfortune. As for this, like other laborer respondents, he
provides a relational perspective: that is, the conditions of *hujin ’guk* are rather the
results of historical colonial interventions. In this regard, he argues that:

In fact, the influences of the so-called *sŏnjin ’guk* such as Europe, which colonized and
exploited the world first, have prevented the countries in Africa and the Third World
from developing such things as education, economy, and people’s level. Without this
structure, they might have been able to develop their own tribal or national cultures.
Even if one sees them as *hujin ’guk* and unenlightened from the globalized perspective,
they might not have been like that from the beginning. They may look like *hujin ’guk*
and dictatorship because of the awkward graft of European capitalism on them. [. . .] In
this respect, we cannot necessarily see them as the unenlightened or *hujin ’guk*.

On the other hand, he does not essentialize the classification of *sŏnjin ’guk* and
*hujin ’guk* either, but recognizes it as reflecting a certain group’s worldviews. In this
respect, he shows a relative perspective on the categorization. As for this, he states that:

For instance, let’s suppose there are a people that eat just two meals a day culturally and
ecologically. From this people’s perspective, is the people eating three meals *sŏnjin ’guk*,
or rich people? No. They may be countries in need, because of starvation and the
defenseless system to natural disaster. [. . .] But, I think what had those *hujin* aspects
and systems grafted on them were European expansionism and colonialism.

In relation to this, this respondent also insists that one can regard certain low-income
countries as *sŏnjin ’guk* insofar as they are enjoying their own social, political, economic,
and cultural systems supporting people’s happiness and satisfaction of life. He gives an
example of Costa Rica as a country being close to this case.

The respondent from *chŏnnong* maintains a deconstructive position in regard to
the concept of *hujin ’guk*. For her, no country should be designated as *hujin ’guk*, as the
term *hujin'guk* is used in a contemptuous manner regardless of reality. In relation to this, she attends to a discrepancy between the image and reality of countries that are referred to as *hujin'guk*. She points out that the designation of *hujin'guk* has an effect of blanketing certain countries with simple negative images. A serious consequence of it, she argues, is the unjust treatment of people in those countries, such as racial prejudice. In this respect, she holds a deconstructive attitude towards representations constructed by the concept of *hujin'guk*. In this regard, she mentions that:

> Being categorized into *hujin'guk*, a country is perceived as quite backward, underdeveloped, and dangerous. Because of this, a problem occurs when we go to that country, and even in Korea, we may ignore those who from that country, instead of treating them personally. I think, thus, that racial prejudice also derives, in some aspects, from the distinction between *sŏnjin'guk*, *chungjin'guk*, and *hujin'guk*.

As for the discrepancy between the image and reality of certain countries typically referred to as *hujin'guk*, she argues that:

> I have been to Indonesia, which people tend to consider as a quite backward, underdeveloped country. However, even if they are different from us in terms of such things as sanitary thought, their national trait and their pride in their country are quite high. However, we seem to be caught in an idea that *hujin'guk* is lazy and so forth.

The respondent from *hwan'gyŏng yŏnhab* also strongly rejects the concept of *hujin'guk*. Above all, for her, it is unjust to paint countries having suffered from colonialism with negative images of *hujin'guk*. In this respect, she prefers to use the concept of victimized countries, focusing on their historical sufferings from “responsible countries.” As for the definition of victimized country, she says that “they
are countries that were exploited much, and still being exploited, politically and economically.” The example of victimized country includes those typically considered as *hujin’guk*, such as countries in Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe. However, her perceptions of those countries are far different from those implied by the concept of *hujin’guk*.

For her, it is the victimized country, rather than the responsible country, that shows much hope for the future of humanity. Therefore, she does not see such a hierarchy between the responsible and victimized countries as is suggested by the discourse of *sŏnjin’guk*. Rather, she perceives the responsible country quite negative, while expecting much from the potentiality of the victimized country. She emphasizes that the victimized country appears somewhat weak in the surface but is not weak in reality and has a lot of potentiality. As such, she rejects the Eurocentric ways of envisioning the world. Furthermore, she argues that the victimized countries’ ways of life can be a reference point for the responsible country in terms of sustainability. With regard to this, she remarks that:

[The victimized country] should not go toward the responsible country, the way of living dependent on so much consumption, so many roads, and so many cars. Rather, we have to train the responsible countries to reduce their consumptions to the half. Taking the responsibility means not only that they take care of others, but also that they reflect on themselves and reduce for themselves. [. . .] In those respects, many countries that should be taken care of can help the responsible countries.

Confucian respondents tend to accept the concept of *hujin’guk* in a limited sense, that is, only meaningful in terms of the modern civilizational framework. Hence, they
argue that different definitions of *hujin’guk* are needed in emerging new postmodern paradigms. For a Confucian respondent, *hujin’guk* in new paradigm is a country that fails to adjust to newly emerging postmodern civilization, in which the values of community and the environment become very important. In other words, *hujin’guk* is a country that does not pay sufficient attention to the values of community and the environment. He argues that any country including those regarded as *sŏnjin’guk* in the modern paradigm can become *hujin’guk* in the new paradigm if they stick to old ideas and practices. He emphasizes that technology and development that are not harmonious with community and the environment have already reached their limits.

The other Confucian respondent puts focus on the harmony of both material and spiritual aspects. In this respect, he argues that either the countries significantly lacking spiritual aspect or those significantly lacking material aspect can be *hujin’guk*. In this regard, China and the U.S. are the examples of *hujin’guk*, which he thinks are lacking the spirit of peace and harmony. As for this, he insists that:

> China is an example of *hujin’guk*. It has excessive pride and uselessly causes a feeling of uneasiness from its neighboring countries. I think the countries behaving like that are *hujin’guk*, and in this sense, the U.S. is quite a *hujin’guk* too.
How wealth has become concentrated in some countries in the modern world has been a major question for development studies. There are generally two perspectives on this: one focuses on internal factors and the other on external factors. The representative school of the former is modernization theory, which tends to consider that the degree of wealth of society is mainly determined by the degree of modernization of its social, cultural, political, economic systems (Rostow 1960; Parsons 1971; Inkeles and Smith 1974). In this perspective, the accumulation of wealth is closely related to modernization, which is indicated by society’s internal modern cultural values, such as affective neutrality, functional specificity, universalism, achievement, and individualism (Parsons 1971). As for this, Greig, Hulme, and Turner (2007:78) point out that “[m]odernization theory explained the prevalence of extreme poverty in poorer countries primarily as a consequence of endogenous forces.” An important political implication of the perspective focusing on “internal” factors is to blame the poor for their own “misfortune.” Upon this ground, modernization theory tends to set Western countries as a universal role model for poor countries to “catch up with” for their modernization and socio-economic development.

A crucial weakness of this theoretical tendency lies in its disregard of power unbalances within and between societies and its underplay of historical contexts of global political economic inequalities (Webster 1984). In this respect, other perspectives
focus on external and structural factors in understanding unequal economic
development among countries. For instance, dependency theory tends to argue that the
“underdevelopment” of certain countries is the very cause for the “development” of
some other countries within the structure of exploitative capitalist world economy
(Frank 1989 [1966]). In this view, underdevelopment and development are the two sides
of the same coin. Besides, theorists in this strand take into account colonial history as an
important factor for the determination of the “developed” and “underdeveloped”
(McMichael 2008). Thus, “underdeveloped” countries should not be blamed for their
undesirable conditions, but the exploitative capitalist world economy that has
historically been constructed through colonialism.

Those ways of understanding global political economic inequality are reflected
in the perceptions of sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk. The promoters of the discourse of
sŏnjin’guk are more likely to focus on internal factors, while those who resist it tend to
attend to external and structural factors in seeing political economic inequality among
countries. The respondents from minju noch’ong generally consider the appearance of
global unbalance, either between the imperial and colonized countries or between the
First and Third Worlds, as a result of the historical expansion of capitalism. Influenced
by Marxist ideas, they assume that profit flows from the weak to the strong in the
capitalist world, which enables the latter’s accumulation of wealth at the expense of the
former. As for the appearance of the First World, for instance, a respondent states that:
I think it is structuralized through the appearance and expansion of capitalism, which established the world economic order and structured world capitalism, and various political and military incidents, such as World War I and II, associated with them.

In this relational and structural perspective, the problem of poor country is not merely its own problem, but should be considered within the structure of the world capitalist system. Thus, the political economic development of the poor country is a matter of the structure of world capitalism. In this respect, the primary interest of the respondents from minju noch’ong does not lie in a country’s upward mobility, e.g., from hujin’guk to sŏnjin’guk. Rather, they pursue the restructuring of the system in a way to guarantee global justice and equality. In this regard, a respondent argues that:

The labor union does not have interest in getting into the First World or sŏnjin’guk. The First World means the structuralized domination-subordination relationship, and sŏnjin’guk is the term frequently used by the government. Thus, progressive parties and labor unions are more interested in the improvement of the quality of people’s life [. . .].

As for the need for just global system, the other respondent states that:

The system that can guarantee human freedom, peace, happiness, and equality is based on the curtailment of working hours at the global level. And, the system that can guarantee basic income for everyone is needed because our material affluence is created not by an individual’s effort but by the shared efforts of humankind.

As for global inequality, the perspective of the respondent from han’guk noch’ong shows a similarity to other laborer respondents. In regard to the problem of poor countries, he attends to the exploitative world political economic order. His understanding of the relationship between the supposed sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk is,
thus, basically relational and structural rather than sequential. In this regard, he questions, “If we are not to go back to ancient communalism, can the exploitative structure, the gap between the powerful country and the weak country, disappear in the global village?” As for the colonial interventions of hujin'guk, he points out that:

African countries may be good to peacefully enthrone their leaders as they did in the past, […] and to live by themselves with their own resources even though they are poor. […] The problem is whether the global structure allows it. The structure of expansionism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century still exists until now. Africa is still playing a role as a resource supplier.

The respondent from kanong also traces the contemporary global inequality to historical exploitations committed by colonial powers. He disputes a mainstream perspective that it is a matter of rational thoughts and scientific attitudes, arguing that “it was the logic of power” and that “they dominated because they had guns and weapons, which were different from rationality.” On the ground of this, he emphasizes wealthy countries’ historical debts to poor countries. He thinks that poor countries may need rich countries’ help in order to escape from extreme poverty. As for this, he argues that:

I think it is desirable that as Europeans anyway committed the historical crime of colonial domination, they should give much help to the countries suffering from extreme poverty for an apology at least. It may not be right for them to ignore those countries. Rich countries, such as Europe, killed a lot of people by causing two world-scale wars and scrambling for colony, and accumulated a lot of wealth through colonial policies. Thus, I think they have to make efforts to give it back so that poor countries can escape from extreme poverty at least.
The respondent from *hwon 'gyong yŏnhab* also considers that the current situations of victimized countries are related to the responsible countries’ colonial interventions in the past. In this respect, she argues for the responsible countries’ duties to support the victimized countries’ efforts to make their own sustainable social models. With regard to this, she says that:

If they were not invaded, and their cultures, civilizations, or cultures were intact, I think different societies might have been constructed through their own development processes. But, they were invaded and changed by others, so their development processes have been slow and behind because the processes were not fitting to them.

However, as an environment activist, she rejects the idea that poor countries’ future is to be the appearances of contemporary rich countries. Negatively perceiving the ways of life of responsible countries, she does not see the transition resembling them as desirable. For her, the transition to excessively consumptive society is not what humankind should pursue. In this context, she emphasizes that it is the time for both responsible and victimized countries to think about sustainable ways of living reflecting each country’s own historical and cultural backgrounds. For this, she argues that any unjust intervention of a certain country should be prohibited. In relation to this, she presents a quite optimistic view on humanity. As for the people’s capacity of managing a good society, she states that:

I think that all human beings would like to live happy and rationally, regardless of race and language. [...] I think any small society, which has more than thirty members, has the capacity of [making a good society for itself].
While envisioning emerging postmodern civilization, a Confucian respondent recognizes the achievements of modern civilization, such as democratic political system and material prosperity. In this respect, he positively evaluates the historical processes of modernization. He considers that the achievement of some crucial aspects of modernity is a virtual precondition for envisioning the new paradigm of civilization. Thus, his discussion of postmodern paradigm is rather relevant to those which have already achieved some important characteristics of modernity. In this respect, he perceives hujin’guk as a country that has first to make efforts to come up with a certain degree of modernity, instead of thinking about postmodern paradigm. In this regard, he argues that:

[. . .] political democracy is the biggest problem for hujin’guk. I think the developments of science and the economy are associated with political democratization, so the developments of science and the economy are not possible without political democratization.

He also thinks that the countries categorized as hujin’guk in the modern paradigm will go through some difficulty in adjusting to the new paradigm. For the development of society, he emphasizes the capacity of adjusting to historical circumstances. In this respect, hujin’guk is the country that has fallen behind the modern trend. Thus, for him, it is very hard for hujin’guk to envision the next postmodern civilizational phase. As for the causes of the historical lag of those countries, he mentions that:
For example, in the case of East Asia, they could not develop a culture valuing not only ethics but also reason, as modern Westerners did. As they paid too much focus on ethics, and looked at the human from that perspective, they oppressed for themselves the possibility of developing a modern mechanical scientific civilization. The reason for underdevelopment lay in the failure in self-transformation toward a new civilization based on rationalism discovered by the West.

As for the secret of the “rise of the West,” he focuses on internal factors, such as the emancipation of human reason. In regard to this, he says that:

It is due to civilizations after modern period, as they say, for example, the individual was freed from authoritarianism, human right and freedom were guaranteed leading to democracy, and, the new economic system of capitalism was developed based on the competition among individuals. And, they accumulated wealth by developing natural resources and technology. These are factors for becoming sŏnjin’guk.

CHALLENGES TO NATIONAL SELF-IDENTITY AND RESISTANCES TO THE SŎNJINHWA PROJECT

A way of interpreting the world is closely related to the construction of identities. In different discursive frameworks, one’s identity becomes differently defined. As for South Korea’s national identity, the interviewees suggest different identities from those promoted by the conventional ideas of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk. Some of the respondents try to put South Korea’s national identity in different discursive frameworks. Others are reluctant to give a clear identity to Korea on the basis of their criticisms of any uni-dimensional classification of countries.
Paying attention to the domination-subordination relationship of the capitalist world political economic order, a respondent from minju noch’ong insists that Korea is a kaebal-dosang-guk (developing country) posited between the First and Third Worlds. For him, South Korea does not reach the First World in terms of “power to control the world economy.” The other respondent from this labor union says that Korea is panje-pansikmin-guk (semi-imperial and semi-colonized country). For him, Korea has many characteristics of the imperial country given its exploitative behaviors against colony-type countries on the global stage. Yet, he points out that the domestic systems of distributing wealth acquired from those behaviors are not like those of the imperial country. That is to say, while the accumulated profit is distributed to laborers in the imperial country, making them an accomplice in the exploitation of colony, much of it does not go to laborers in Korea. He adds that this creates conflictive social atmosphere in Korean society, which is not a characteristic of the imperial country either.

Yet, the majority of the respondents are somewhat reluctant to give a simple national identity to South Korea. For them, there can be various national identities in multiple forms according to a variety of criteria. Refusing to use a uni-dimensional criterion in identifying countries, they pay attention to different historical and cultural contexts, in which each country has maintained itself.

As the attitudes towards the concept of sŏnjin’guk are different, so are the attitudes towards the concept of sŏnjinhwa (achieving advancement). Even though the phrase of sŏnjinhwa is popular in mainstream discourses, there is no general consensus on what the state of sŏnjinhwa is. In this situation, the interviewees present different
thoughts and views on it, reflecting their own social and political economic positions and interests. Many of them tend to consider it as a euphemism for various governmental policies promoted mainly for the ruling groups’ interests.

The respondents from minju noch’ong tend to see the term sŏnjinhwa as strongly reflecting capitalists’ interests. They argue that various policies of sŏnjinhwa are no more than the disguise of the oppressions of laborers. As for this, a respondent argues that:

For example, all the policies called sŏnjinhwa in the labor area are just for oppressing labor unions. The sŏnjinhwa of the labor-capital relationship is all about deregulations reflecting capitalists’ positions.

The respondents from this labor union argue that the phrase of sŏnjinhwa promoted by the contemporary Lee Myung-Bak administration is even short of following the practices of those typically referred to as sŏnjin’guk. Far from many good policies and systems adopted by those countries, a respondent argues, “What the Korean government calls sŏnjinhwa are mostly those selected policies matching its interests, wrapped up under the name of sŏnjinhwa.” They contend that people who get most of the government’s sŏnjinhwa policies are those in the ruling class. This kind of negative perceptions of sŏnjinhwa is shared by the respondents from other organizations. Many of them relate it to the global trend of neoliberal policies. A respondent from farmers’ organization argues that the sŏnjinhwa project promoted by the government “seems to consider the U.S. as the model,” which he considers as a main promoter of neoliberalism around the globe.
Some point out the ambiguity of the concept of sŏnjinhwa. The respondent from hwan’gyŏng yŏnhab points out that sŏnjinhwa has no substantial thing but is just a phrase. She argues that “[the government] uses the term sŏnjinhwa without substantial things, and thus people think of it differently from one another.” In this respect, she argues that the substance of sŏnjinhwa should be discussed first. She mentions that:

I think there have first to be discussion and consensus on which direction the society wants to go to. The substance of sŏnjinhwa should be discussed first: whether sŏnjinhwa is the per capita income of $20,000; whether it is free education; whether it is making all regular employees; whether it is making the pollution level of Seoul below a certain level; or whether it is certain level of green belt ratio.

Based upon the criticism of the governmental notion of sŏnjinhwa, she suggests her own concept of true sŏnjinhwa. She argues that four basic elements closely related to people’s quality of life should be preconditions for sŏnjinhwa: human right, welfare, education, and the responsibility for the earth. As for true sŏnjinhwa, she states that:

I think the basic thing is to resolve the problems of human right, welfare, and education. The education problem is to make free education: that is, letting anyone study, who would like to study. The human right problem is to guarantee all rights for residence, food, education, and voting and participation in politics regardless of sex, age, and nationality. The welfare problem is to give enough social support for someone’s care if he (or she) has a problem. […] If one more thing is to be added, we have to feel a responsibility for the earth.

The Confucian respondents present their visions of sŏnjinhwa based upon the perceptions of the limitations of the modern paradigm. They argue that Confucian values have much to contribute to true sŏnjinhwa. In this perspective, South Korea
should look more inside than outside in order for true sŏnjinhwa. As for true sŏnjinhwa, a respondent raises a need for assimilating to nature:

Any administration has had the goal of building sŏnjin’guk. However, what is called as sŏnjin is, in fact, to resemble the order of nature. It is a true ideal society in terms of Asian thoughts to make all people and lives have their own natures. As humans have various types, it is ideal to guarantee their own colors matching their types and to make all things flourish in their styles. Then, it is clear what sŏnjin is in our society. It is to make a balance by bracing up those who are living very poor while distributing from those who have too much and elated. Current policies do not seem to match this.

RESISTANCES TO EUROCENTRISM

As Eurocentric ideas are implicit in the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, resistances to it are related to the criticism of Eurocentrism. Many interviewees criticize the assumptions and characteristics of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk in terms of the critiques of Eurocentrism. In the context of criticizing sŏnjinhwa as well as the classificatory system of sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk, a respondent from minju noch’ong argues that sŏnjinhwa and sŏguhwa (Westernization) are virtually the same. By identifying the sŏnjinhwa project with Westernization, he undermines the authority of the concept of sŏnjinhwa and various policies promoted under its name. In particular, he criticizes the contemporary Lee Myung-Bak administration’s sŏnjinhwa slogan as the same thing as Westernization, especially Americanization.

On the other hand, the other respondent from this labor union pays attention to that the contemporary sŏnjinhwa slogan does not even reflect the merits of Western
societies. Regarding European societies as advanced over Korean society in terms of labor conditions, this respondent considers that Westernization or sŏguhwa in the literal sense can bring some merits to Korean society. However, for him, contemporary sŏnjinhwa policies are merely the biased selections of various Western labor policies, which mainly serve the capitalists’ interests. With regard to this, he states that:

[Sŏnjinhwa and sŏguhwa] are very different. [. . .] Europe is totally different [from Korea]. In terms of various policies against laborers and basic labor rights, there are numerous differences between the two. Even though our situation is different, they say globalization or global standard as if foreign countries have similar policies. Basic facts are wrong [. . .].

While respecting Western societies’ labor conditions and quality of life, this respondent rejects Eurocentric conceptualization of the world. In regard to Eurocentric ideas implicit in the concepts of sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk, he argues that:

What we call the sŏnjin’guk model is Europe or the U.S., but there are no such barbarian countries as them, considering what they did in World War I and II. In this respect, how can they be sŏnjin’guk? The basis of that barbarism derives from their basic worldview, historical perspective, and epistemology. The roots are the philosophy and historical perspective of modern enlightenment thought. [. . .] Our historical view and philosophy have something to drive evil away, and in this perspective, we are not hujin’guk. Even though we were colonized, we did not kill people or something. We may not call it as hujin’guk. If following the Eurocentric historical view, we are necessarily to make those mistakes to humanity.

The respondent from han’guk noch’ong expresses similar opinions to those of the laborers above. He criticizes the classificatory system of sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk as Eurocentric in the sense that it mainly reflects some limited indices of economic
performances, such as GDP. Resisting to this kind of Eurocentric criteria, he tries to suggest a different framework of interpreting the world. In this regard, he appreciates the value of pursuing happiness. As for some countries’ pursuits of happiness, such as the Bhutanese Gross National Happiness (GNH), he argues that:

It is desirable. We don’t have this kind of concept at all. [. . .] As we have reached a certain level of living standard, it is the time to pay attention to it. [. . .] I had a good breakfast this morning, but was not happy to see homeless people in the subway. Then, even if I ate five thousand won-value breakfast this morning, I would be happier to eat four thousand won-value meal in order to provide one thousand won-value meal to them. In this way, we have to make a discourse that values a situation in which we feel happiness together.

Other respondents show attitudes of appreciating Korean traditions and Asian values over the supposed Western values. On this ground, they strongly oppose to sŏghwa and advocate a need for searching for Korea’s own identity rooted in good traditions and cultural heritages. The respondent from chŏnnong, for instance, states that:

Sŏghwa is quite much processed in terms of consciousness or culture. It has been considered as the correct answer. [. . .] As [the West is] regarded as the correct answer and something to follow in order not to be backward, Western dietary habits and cultures have been considerably adopted.

While being cautious about blindly following Western social systems, she suggests a need for learning from various countries including those regarded as hujin ‘guk.

The respondent from kanong considers that Western countries have good social and political economic systems. Reflecting farmers’ position, he argues that many of them value agriculture and try to nurture it as key national industry. For him, they
attends much to their traditional values. He argues that this situation is in contrast with
Korean society that does not much appreciate its traditions and cultural heritages. In this
regard, he raises a need for Koreans to recognize the value of agriculture that is rooted
in Korean tradition. He considers that the mainstream way of classifying sŏnjin’guk and
hujin’guk does not respect each society’s unique traditions and cultures. With regard to
this, he states that:

> It is undesirable to schematically distinguish between sŏnjin’guk, chungjin’guk, and
> hujin’guk. Every society has its own culture and tradition, and there are countries that
> maintain their own national communities. It is not desirable to schematically distinguish
> in a way that one is sŏnjin’guk and others are chungjin’guk or hujin’guk because they
> are economically and militarily weak.

The respondent from hwan’gyŏng yŏnhab is very critical of Korea’s losing the
merits of its own traditions and becoming “Westernized.” This reflects her perspective
that the Western mass-consumption society is not the answer but a disaster for the world.
She emphasizes that each society needs to develop its own sustainable model reflecting
its own cultural values. In this respect, she highly appreciates various forms of life
around the world, rather than a universal convergent model. In this regard, she argues
that the Bhutanese concept of happiness can be usefully applied to Korean society. In
her words, “It is applicable. It is not that much money necessarily means happiness.
Sometimes people seem to know that, but some other times they don’t seem to know
that.” She regards “cold-hearted” rationality as both merits and demerits of Western
societies. For her, many aspects of Korean tradition, such as communalism deriving

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from agricultural culture, are more useful for imagining the future of Korean society, than the “cold-hearted” Western values.

Seeing the limitations of modern civilization led by the West, the Confucian scholars envision different postmodern civilizations. As for the limitations of modern Western civilization in comparison with Asian civilization, a respondent states that:

They, Western civilization, don’t value the universality of humankind. Religiously, they have the same intolerance as Christianity has. Thus, even if they achieved democratization, they invaded Africa, Latin America, and Asia. This is the limit of Western civilization. That is, it is the limit of Western civilization to have such a gimcrack cause of spreading Christianity. Confucianism is not like that. In Confucianism, it is inconceivable to destroy other civilizations in order to spread Confucianism. If there was no invasion from Western civilization, Confucianism might have established a civilization of new paradigm by far more mild and peaceful methods in its way, although it might have been slow.

In this respect, the attitude to regard Western societies as the ideal is criticized as being confined within the worldview of modern paradigm. The Confucians also argue that Asian ideas including Confucianism have much to contribute to building new paradigms. Thus, they argue that Koreans need to pay more attention to their cultural heritages. This is also a ground upon which Eurocentrism is criticized. A respondent argues that Koreans’ Eurocentrism has been promoted by intellectuals during the post-colonial era, who failed to ground in the root of Korean traditions when adopting European ideas. He argues that this is a main reason why South Korea has been undergoing spiritual wandering regardless of its world-scale economy. With regard to this, he points out that:
In fact, spiritual wandering and conflict still remain for intellectual leaders as well as the general public. [...]. Not having spiritual trunk, we are continuously wandering even with the 10th largest economic size in the world.

As for Korea’s “Westernization” and the way of classifying countries according to material criteria, he mentions that:

It [Korea] has become a society in which one puts priority on his (her) own interests. This is the ultimate goal of the Western society. Accomplishment is first, and for the accomplishment, one should survive as the fittest. As the survival of the fittest is considered as the law of nature, it does not need any sympathy for the people dying. Then, only the sharp, scary, and thorough accomplishment is valued in society, like a lion snatches a prey, while such things as mutual care, sympathy, and sharing are put behind.

This respondent argues that the pursuit of ideal society should be rooted in each society’s cultural context. In this respect, Confucianism is not the idea of passé but of the present and the future. He emphasizes that Confucianism has many aspects to contribute to overcoming modernity. In this regard, he argues that:

It has many alternative structures to overcome modernity. For example, it sees the universe as an organic relationship, not a conflictive one. It has a framework in which the universe as the big universe and I as the small universe can be harmonized to create something great.
CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined that the basic assumptions and ideas of the discourse of ᵁⁿjin’guk are far differently understood and contested by people in counter-hegemonic groups. As for the dualistic classification of ᵁⁿjin’guk and hujin’guk, all of the respondents refuse to accept it as is suggested by the conventional ideas of the discourse of ᵁⁿjin’guk. People from labor unions tend to criticize the classificatory system for reflecting the exploiters’ values and interests in the capitalist world order. Influenced by Marxist ideas, they suggest different categories for understanding the world, which reflect power relations in the world political economic order. In these perceptual frameworks, the countries typically referred to as ᵁⁿjin’guk are rather represented as imperial countries or First World countries, implying their exploitative characters in the capitalist world order.

Some respondents disapprove of the classification on the grounds that it does not reflect the diversity of the world. These people argue that we should not make a hierarchy among societies or countries according to uni-dimensional criteria. They point out that a society has various cultural and historical aspects that are not appropriately taken into account by the simple dualistic categorization. In their frameworks, there is no such a country that is to be constantly referred to as ᵁⁿjin’guk or hujin’guk. Rather, the distinction between the two becomes highly blurred, and a certain country can become ᵁⁿjin’guk in some aspects and hujin’guk in other aspects, if one should use such terms. Some of the respondents resist to the discourse of ᵁⁿjin’guk by suggesting
alternative ways of classification, such as responsible countries and victimized countries. Others show inclinations to deconstruct the hierarchical world represented by the sŏnjin'guk - hujin'guk system.

Confucian scholars tend to present other interpretive frameworks of the world, which can make up for the limitations of the modern paradigm. Envisioning new postmodern paradigms, they criticize the basic assumptions of the discourse of sŏnjin'guk as mainly reflecting the values of the modern paradigm, which tends to appropriate nature and humans. On this ground, they suggest that true sŏnjin'guk in new paradigms should reflect values of harmony between nature and humans, and argue that Confucianism and Asian values can contribute much to the building of a new world that is based upon postmodern values and worldviews.

Different understandings of the sŏnjin'guk - hujin'guk classification leads to different national self identity and different national vision. As for national identity, those who suggest alternative classificatory systems give South Korea certain national identities, such as “in between the First World (or imperial country) and the Third World (or colonized country).” However, many respondents are reluctant to give South Korea one stable identity as their perceptual frameworks are far more complicated than the dualistic classification. The respondents also challenge the project of sŏnjinhwa promoted mainly by ruling groups. Many point out that the contents of the project are somewhat unclear as the picture of sŏnjin'guk is not clearly presented by its promoters. In this situation, the policies promoted under the name of sŏnjinhwa are criticized as mainly reflecting the interests of ruling groups. Many of them also point out that the
sŏnjinhwa project is no more than the promotion of neoliberalism in Korea in the neoliberal globalization trend, which oppresses subordinated groups’ interests.

This chapter has also examined that the criticisms of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk reflect resistances to Eurocentric interpretive frameworks of the world. Many respondents pay attention to that the basic assumptions of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk reflect the values, worldviews, and interests of the West. They argue that as its classificatory system uses the criteria Western countries have strengths, these countries tend to be idealized and come to enjoy cultural hegemony. As a reaction to Western cultural hegemony, many respondents emphasize the importance of Korean traditions and cultural heritages. Rather than positing South Korea in the Eurocentric framework and envisioning its future according to it, they argue that the country should develop their own values and worldviews reflecting their traditions and cultures. Many respondents also point out that this would contribute to the building of a better world.

This chapter has shown that the basic assumptions and characteristics of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk are contested by various social groups. However, those contestations and resistances do not yet appear in a form of active movements of presenting alternative frameworks. In this situation, the discourse of sŏnjin’guk still enjoys a hegemonic status. The problems of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, however, are well acknowledged in the resistant voices expressed at the personal level. In that knowledge reflects power, the power of developmentalism in South Korea may not change unless the power of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk changes. In this respect, various ideas and thoughts on the discourse of sŏnjin’guk should be exposed to public
discussions so that the mainstream worldview can reflect more diverse values and interests within the country.
CHAPTER 5
THE WEST AND EAST ASIAN IDENTITIES: A COMPARISON OF THE DISCOURSES OF KOREAN Sŏnjin’guk, JAPANESE NIHONJINRON, AND CHINESE NEW NATIONALISM

Korea, China, and Japan share in common that their onsets of early modernization projects were motivated by the unexpected external shock, that is, Western countries’ expansions in the “age of empire” (Hobsbawm 1987). Encountering the threat from outside, they were desperate for strengthening their economic and military powers in order not to be taken over by the “barbarians.” They suddenly faced a paradoxical situation where they had to participate in the game set by the West in order to resist it (Sakai 1989). Thus, the radical transformations of society were attempted from above in the three East Asian countries. Among others, this type of modernizations can be conceptualized as that which is provoked by “a sudden external threat” (Therborn 1995).

Actual modernization processes in the three countries were, however, quite different from one another in their visions and practices (W. Kim 2005; Paek 2009). In the early period, Korean and Chinese self modernization efforts were constantly interrupted by the imperial powers’ intervention, whereas that of Japanese took advantage of the colonization of its neighboring countries. The divergence of the paths to modernity between three countries is also notable in the post-colonial era. While Korean and Japanese modernization processes can be characterized as capitalist ones,
the Chinese process is a socialist one. Therefore, the Chinese modernization process brought about very different forms of modernity from those of Korea and Japan.

Closely intertwined with these different historical circumstances are the appearance of different national identities, worldviews, and subjectivities of modernity among them. With regard to this, I observe that there have appeared notably different discourses on national self identity, modernity, and perception of the West in Korea, Japan, and China. In particular, I pay attention to that the discourses of Korean sŏnjin’guk, Japanese nihonjinron, and Chinese new nationalism have respectively constructed dominant national identities and worldviews in recent decades. While the discourse of sŏnjin’guk is developmental discourse and, thus, constructs national identity in developmental terms, nihonjinron demonstrates an ethnocentric discourse expressing a cultural type of national identity. In comparison, Chinese new nationalism shows a cultural and ideological type of discourse. Despite these differences, I consider that these discourses have represented one of the most dominant national identities and worldviews, especially vis-à-vis the West, in those countries in recent years.48 Given that these discourses have exerted significant influence on those countries’

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48 It is interesting to see that the terms sŏnjin’guk (先進國) and hujin’guk (後進國) are also used in China and Japan. The terms consisting of Chinese letters are differently read in Japan as senshinkoku and koushinkoku, and in China as xian jin guo and hou jin guo respectively. In this respect, the comparison of the use of the same terms 先進國 and 後進國 among the three countries would also be useful. It would show the commonalities and individualities in the construction of national identities and worldviews, reflected in the words commonly used by them. For instance, the Japanese use of 先進國 is somewhat different from that of Koreans in the sense that it represents their own national identity as “advanced” country vis-à-vis other backward countries, e.g., ASEAN countries. As such, the concept of 先進國 refers to the self for the Japanese, while it implies the advanced “other” for Koreans. There is also a difference in the frequency of the public use of the terms: among the three countries, for instance, the term 先進國 seems to be the most popularly used in Korea. However, as this study’s focus is on the countries’ national identities vis-à-vis the West, I consider that the comparison of the discourses of sŏnjin’guk, nihonjinron, and new nationalism is more appropriate at this stage.
contemporary global and regional politics, it is useful to comparably examine those discourses in order to understand discursive backgrounds underlying the East Asian countries’ different collective responses to global and regional phenomena and trends.

In those respects, this chapter aims to examine similarities and dissimilarities in the three East Asian countries’ subjectivities of modernities and their constructions of national identities vis-à-vis the West, reflected in the discourses of sŏnjin’guk, nihonjinron, and new nationalism. By investigating differences in interpretations and representations of national self and the world, this study intends to broaden a comparative understanding of notable collective sentiments appearing in the three neighboring Asian countries. Main research questions are: how do they construct their self national identities vis-à-vis the West; how is the West, the most significant other in their modernization processes, represented in the discourses; and how do the discourses reflect the countries’ awareness of modernities?

This study consists of four main sections. The first section examines the historical backgrounds of the rise of the discourses of sŏnjin’guk, nihonjinron, and new nationalism, and their characteristics in general. The second section investigates the commonalities and differences in the perception of the West reflected in the three discourses. The third section focuses on the three discourses’ different constructions of self national identity. And the last section explores the discourses in terms of the subjectivities of modernities.
The discourse of sŏnjin’guk is a system of knowledge that is constructed around the concepts of sŏnjin’guk (advanced country) and hujin’guk (backward country). One of its notable characteristics is a hierarchical distinction between sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk, in which the former has the latter as its alienated other. Naturalizing the hierarchy between the two central concepts, it has given justification to Korea’s efforts to “catch up with” sŏnjin’guk. In this way, it has played a crucial role in supporting Korean developmental regime. It has also provided dominant interpretive frameworks of national identities and worldviews for South Koreans in their national developmental processes.

The distinction between sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk is akin to the Eurocentric developmental distinction between the “developed” and “developing” (or “underdeveloped”) (Sachs, 1992; Escobar, 1995; Nederveen Pieterse, 2009). In fact, Western countries are virtually referred to as sŏnjin’guk. In this respect, the discourse strongly takes Eurocentric bearings. In the process of national development, South Koreans projected their positive and negative developmental values into the concepts of sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk respectively. In this sense, the discourse is Koreans’ own construction reflecting the specificity of their historical developmental experiences, rather than a faithful reflection of reality “out there.” As an ideal image, sŏnjin’guk has played a central role in guiding the transformation of the Korean society, e.g., as an urgent national goal and an important reference point.
The formation of the sŏnjin‘guk discourse coincides with the launch of the Park Chung-Hee regime in the early 1960s. Seizing power through a military coup d‘etat, the Park regime sought for its legitimacy from the achievement of “choguk kūndaehwa” (the modernization of motherland). The Park regime’s pursuit of aggressive modernization and rapid economic growth was justified by the discourse of sŏnjin‘guk, which supposed a somewhat linear universal path of development with sŏnjin‘guk ahead and Korea (hujin‘guk) behind. The global hegemonic discourse of developmentalism and modernization theory, which echoed U.S. hegemony, deeply influenced the discursive formation of sŏnjin‘guk. As the modernization project tended to seek for the cause of the supposed backwardness of Korea from its traditional values and lifestyles, the efforts for radical transformation of Korean society were legitimated, such as the saemaŭl undong (New Village Movement) that aimed for the dramatic change in both material and spiritual conditions (Choe 1976).

In the discourse, the West as sŏnjin‘guk plays as a major referent with which Korea should catch up in the near future. The discourse tends to assume various social, cultural, and political economic ideas and practices of the West as advanced and universal, and, thus, directly applicable to the Korean situation. Moreover, they are frequently considered as what Korea has to adopt to become sŏnjin‘guk. For instance,

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49 Korea’s attitudes towards the West have been quite friendly throughout the postwar period. This is in some ways related to its historical experience of the Cold War in the wake of the Korean War, in which Korean elites regarded the West, especially the U.S., as the supporter of their country. In its modernization process, Korean ruling elites have developed somewhat strong mental and material connections with foreign powers. As for this, Kim (2009:11) notes that “for the past 100 years, Korean society maintained its ruling structure of three party alliances, which combined political and economic ruling groups with foreign powers.”
Korea’s neoliberal reformation in various fields in recent years under such slogans as *sŏnjinhwa* (achieving advancement) and *segyehwa* (globalization) demonstrates its willingness to adopt the global neoliberal trend led by major Western countries.

*Nihonjinron* (theories of Japaneseeseness) is a historical concept reflecting the Japanese deep-rooted awareness of their “uniqueness” and “difference.” During the Tokugawa period, for instance, the *kokugaku* (national learning) school tried to differentiate Japanese culture from that of China by emphasizing the Japanese emperor’s place and indigenous Japanese cultural custom. While the *kokugaku* school promoted the “uniqueness” of Japan vis-à-vis China, then significant other, the contemporary discourse of *nihonjinron* appeared in a little different historical context, mainly as a response to Western cultural hegemony.

For a while after World War II, Japan had to struggle with its identity problem associated with “symbolic vacuum” as formerly absolutized national symbols lost their legitimacy and authority after the defeat in the war. As Befu (2001:87) notes, “With defeat, Japan was no longer able to exploit effectively the most important symbols expressing national identity and nationalism,” such as “the imperial institution, the ‘national’ flag, the ‘national’ anthem, the ‘national’ emblem, and national monuments and state rituals.” Japanese identity discourse has alternated between positive and negative ones according to geopolitical and geoeconomic factors. When such factors are considered as favorable to Japan, positive cultural nationalism prevails and vice-versa (Befu 2001). The *nihonjinron* discourse reflects Japanese self-identification in a positive light, shored up by their supposed economic success and the achievement of the
high level of consumer society in the 1960s and 1970s. With *nihonjinron*, the Japanese began to promote their self-confidence, and went further to argue that Japanese society and culture were not only unique and different from those of the West but even superior to them.

*Nihonjinron* promulgates the uniqueness of Japanese society and culture. The whole genre of *nihonjinron* deals with “Japan’s identity, attempting to establish Japan’s uniqueness and to differentiate Japan from other cultures” (Befu 2001:2). It is based upon some mythical notions claiming to the uniqueness and homogeneity of Japan. For instance, imagining an abstractly enclosed community within the national boundary, it asserts that “the Japanese people are a homogeneous ‘race’ and possess a homogeneous culture [. . .]” (*ibid.*:68). Japanese uniqueness is considered as deeply related to their homogeneity, and thus “Japaneseness” is assumed as inherent in people, culture, language as well as land (or geographical traits) in themselves. In this way, it tries to create an essentialistic link between the supposed national characteristics, and cultural and geographical conditions of Japan. It argues, for instance, that “the Japanese language is natively spoken only by Japanese in Japan” (*ibid.*:35).

Regardless of its ultra-ethnocentric implication, *nihonjinron* has been one of the most prominent discourses on Japanese modern self-identity and worldviews. It has served for Japanese conservative ruling elites as a discourse for the management of country, society, and organizations by appropriating the values of collectivity, loyalty, and harmony. In this respect, *nihonjinron* has played a role as a “kind of ideology” associated with the “interests of the ruling social class or stratum” (Yoshino 1992:185).
In relation to this, Befu (2001:79) points out that *nihonjinron* plays a political role as a “model for behavior” for the Japanese. The building of *nihonjinron* as a hegemonic discourse was explicitly and implicitly supported by Japan studies-related institutions, such as Japan Foundation and the International Research Center for Japanese Studies, one of whose main missions was known as disseminating and propagating *nihonjinron* (Befu 1993).

Unlike the capitalist development of the two neighboring countries, China chose a totally different path of socialist one. In Lin’s (2006) terms, China took “revolutionary modernity” that combined nationalism, socialism, and developmentalism. With regard to this, she notes that “[n]ationalism denotes national unity, sovereignty, and autonomy; socialism stands for equality and social justice; and developmentalism implies a determination to overcome backwardness” (Lin 2006:60). Chinese intellectuals suggest that this kind of Chinese modernity can be an alternative to the Eurocentric singular form of capitalist modernity that is inherently exploitative. Focusing on the difference in the concept of modernization between China and the West, Wang (1998:13) argues that “the modernization in Chinese discourse and the modernization in modernization theory are different.” According to Wang (1998:13-7), Chinese full-scale modernization has begun with Mao’s socialism as a modern anti-capitalist modernization theory (or anti-modern theory of modernization), and thus “inherent in China’s socialist modernization experience is a historical antimodernity.”

Ever since China’s encounter with the imperial expansion of the West, one of the most important goals of China has been to establish a “strong nation,” as is
expressed in a Chinese term “qianguomeng” (the dream of strong China) (Hunt 1993; Zhao 1997). Chinese intellectuals’ nationalistic “quest for national greatness” is based upon the “recollections of ancient grandeur combined with outrage at China’s humiliation” (Zhao 1997:725). Remembering the glory of the Central Kingdom in the past, the Chinese tended to consider that modern Chinese history was studded with humiliation mainly caused by Western powers. Despite Chinese nationalists’ common aspiration for a strong nation, there was a discrepancy among them in the ways of achieving it. A notable trend among Chinese intellectuals in the 1980s was anti-traditionalism, which was popularized with the launch of Deng Xiaoping’s reform and opening policies. Reflected in the term “Western learning fever” (xixue re), the anti-traditional trend regarded the West as an ideal, and argued for the reformation of the society modeling after it.

This epochal trend, however, changed in the 1990s under different domestic and international circumstances, with the appearance of the new strand of nationalism. In response to “Chinese problems,” the new nationalism argued that the Western-oriented modernization promoted by anti-traditional reformers brought about various crises in China, such as “the decline of national identity, the decline in traditional values and in Marxist or Maoist faith” (Zheng 1999:47). To redress them the new nationalism developed alternative arguments emphasizing the need for a strong centralized government and the promotion of “Chineseness”; the recognition of the importance of Chinese traditions and cultural heritages; as well as the reevaluation of Mao Zedong. The new nationalism denounced the liberal modernization process during the 1980s as a
kind of Westernization that would eventually endanger China. Witnessing the
disintegration of the Soviet Union, the advocates of new nationalism argued that “a
strong State is crucial for China to survive as a unified nation-state” and that
modernization should be based upon nationalism (Zheng 1999:44). Many of the
advocates came from the so-called “New Left” (distinguished from Mao’s Old Left),
who reemphasized the importance of Chinese socialist identity. In this context, the New
Left promoted new conservatism and new authoritarianism, and became allied with
anti-Western ideas to some extent.

The rise of new nationalism accompanied the Chinese disenchantment with the
West in the general public, and they recognized that “the West was not perfect, [. . .]
and that its practices were unfair towards China’s national interests” (Zheng 1999:51-2).
Anti-Western sentiments among the Chinese were provoked by some controversial
incidents in the 1990s, such as China’s failure in its bid for the 2000 Olympic Games,
the U.S. bombardment of Chinese embassy in Serbia, and the delay of China’s entry
into the World Trade Organization. Along with anti-Western discourses, those incidents
intrigued many Chinese to realize that the West was not the supporter of their building
of a strong nation. The “China threat” theories raised by Western (especially American)
scholars in the international relations field fueled Chinese anti-Western and anti-
American sentiments.

The Chinese new nationalism is based upon the mistrust to the West, which
some criticize as a negative essentialization of the West, Occidentalism (Chen 1995).
The previously believed anti-traditional modernization was disputed as a way to
dismantle the Chinese nation in the face of Western hegemony. Anti-traditionalists tended to criticize the Chinese conventional patriotic spirit for “denying China’s backwardness” (Zhao 1997). They tended to regard the Western path as a way to effectively modernize China, which is impossible without the recognition of the weaknesses of China. However, with the rise of the new nationalism, the West was mainly perceived as the invader of Chinese nation and identity, and the Chinese started to (re)focus on Chinese values, vis-à-vis the West. This resulted in the rise of cultural conservatism in which “Confucianism struck back” (Yan 2008). In this regard, Yan (2008:135) argues that the cultural conservatism unfolded mainly in two ways: “a popular movement to study the classics and an elite movement to construct China’s soft power.”

The rise of the Chinese new nationalism reflects the change of international settings around China. As Zhao (1997:738) notes, it “coincided with the end of the Cold War and China’s rapid economic growth [in the 1990s].” This is related to a view that the Soviet Union did not achieve a strong nation by adopting the Western model but collapsed just because of it. The Chinese mistrust to the West is interlinked with their gaining of confidence in the nation’s rapid economic growth, which is putatively in contrast with the fate of their rival country in the socialist race.

The Chinese confidence is well reflected in a statement of Guan Shijie, a Chinese high-profile intellectual: “the time has come for the West to learn from the East. The West should switch positions and the teacher should become a student. The Confucian concept of universal harmony will be dominant during the next century,
which will be one of peace and development” (cited in Zhao 1997:736). As such, 

“‘Western learning fever’ (xixue re) common in the 1980s was taken over by 
‘Chinese/Confucius learning fever’ (guoxue re) among intellectuals [...]” (ibid.). In 
those respects, the new nationalism reflects the Chinese awareness of their country’s 
changing status and the change of global historical circumstances, which are 
characterized by some theorists as the “(re)emergence of Asia” (Frank 1998; Arrighi 
and Silver 1999; Arrighi 2007) or “global rebalancing” (Nederveen Pieterse 2010).

THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE WEST

As some theorists note, the assumption of the Western monopoly of modernity is based 
upon a “disconnected” Eurocentric “tunnel” historiography (Blaut 1993; 
Subrahmanyam 1997; Washbrook 1997). Regardless of the conceptualization of 
modernity, which might have begun from the West, it would be more appropriate to say 
that “modern phenomena” had existed scattered around the world more evenly than is 
generally assumed by the Eurocentric tunnel historiography. In this perspective, what 
we recognize as modernity is the result of a broad range of historical and spatial 
interactions. This does not mean, yet, that many non-Western societies’ modernization 
projects were free from the impact from the West. In many ways, Korea, China, and 
Japan launched their early modernization projects to cope with the threat from the West. 
For this, they paradoxically had to accept the West in order to resist it, which created “a
dilemma between modernization and westernization” (Zheng 1999:53). In this context, the West has appeared as the most significant other to the three Asian countries from their early modernization processes. It played an important role in providing reference points in their modernization processes. However, the ways the West is represented differ across countries and contingent upon historical circumstances. As Dittmer and Kim (1993) note, the West has played a positive referent for some while negative one for others in relation to their constructions of national identity in the processes of modernization.

The discourse of sŏnjin’guk is a kind of convergence theory premised upon a belief in the linear universal path of development. On this development path, sŏnjin’guk is represented as the foregoer while hujin’guk as the follower. In this perception, the diversity of societal forms associated with different historical, cultural contexts does not draw much attention. The Western capitalist forms of society are generally represented as prototypes that other societies are to follow. As such, the West is represented as having desirable social, political, economic, and cultural forms, out of which a cultural hierarchy between the “West and the Rest” appears (Hall 1996). In regard to the historical background of the hierarchy, the rise of the West is mainly understood in terms of endogenous factors, such as the development of reason, while its historical expansions accompanied by the unprecedented level of physical and mental violence is generally overlooked.

In the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, the concept of sŏnjin’guk frequently refers to the U.S. and Western European countries (and Japan). Combined with the image of
sŏnjin’guk, those countries tend to be idealized regardless of reality. As for the nature of Korea’s relationship with the West, the discourse of sŏnjin ‘guk assumes it basically as a reciprocal one. As is assumed by modernization theory in which the West is portrayed as a benevolent helper of the development of the underdeveloped, the West in the discourse of sŏnjin ‘guk tends to be regarded as a cooperator of the development of Korea. The social, cultural, and political economic characteristics of the West are generally conceived of as universal, and thus directly comparable and applicable to Korean society. In a similar vein, many aspects of Korean society, which are supposed as different from those of the West, are often regarded as the remnants of the past, and thus as the signs of Korea’s status of not being a full-fledged sŏnjin ’guk yet.

As such, the discourse gives justification to the West-oriented transformation of Korean society. In regard to this, the concept of sŏnjin ’guk plays diverse roles in Korea in suggesting a point of direction, a standard of comparison, a desirable model, a reference case, a trend to follow, a preceding subject, a criterion of normality, a reference for national identity, and a competitor. As Western countries are frequently represented as sŏnjin ‘guk, the discourse of sŏnjin ’guk serves as a ground for maintaining Western hegemony in Korea. Thus, some Korean scholars argue that the developmental distinction between chŏgaebal-guk (underdeveloped country), kaebal-dosang-guk (developing country), and sŏnjin ‘guk is nothing but an indication of the degree of Westernization (Park 2003).

In the discourse of nihonjinron, in contrast, the image of the West becomes less attractive. In this discourse, the West is portrayed as lacking many of what Japan
uniquely has. A basic idea underlying the discourse of *nihonjinron* in terms of the comparison of Japan and the West is that the latter has achieved economic prosperity but not social harmony, while Japan has both of them. Japanese uniqueness supposedly inherent in diverse aspects of Japanese culture and society is suggested as the secret for the Japanese successful achievement of both economic prosperity and social harmony. This perception of *nihonjinron* is the basis of its argument that the Japanese society is, in many aspects, better than Western ones.

However, the assumption of Japanese superiority does not necessarily mean that the West is ignored in *nihonjinron*. Rather, the Japanese have been very aware of the West as the most significant other throughout their modern history. In fact, the discourse of *nihonjinron* has appeared as a response to Western hegemony, and therefore, many aspects of Japanese uniqueness proposed by *nihonjinron* are virtually meaningful only in relation to the West (Befu 2001). What is assumed to be unique in Japan is actually what the West is not assumed to have. As Befu (2001:7) notes, “It is only because Japan and the West happen to share a similar kinship system (including monogamy), share a materialistic orientation, and lack a caste system that these phenomena are not at issue in the modern *Nihonjinron*.” In a similar vein, he adds that “*Nihonjinron* would probably concern itself with Japan’s monogamous marriage system [. . .]” if the Islamic world or India, instead of the West, happened to be Japan’s contrastive referent (*ibid.*).

The Japanese have continuously contrasted their society with the West throughout their modern history. Their perceptions of the West have been closely
related to how they perceive the status of their country. The degree of Japanese self-confidence vis-à-vis the West has been reflected on the degree of positive attitude towards their national self. When they had confidence, they saw their national self in a positive way and vice versa (Befu 1993). In this respect, *nihonjinron*’s degree of assurance in the self reflects the Japanese recovery of self-confidence from the identity problem of the postwar period. On the basis of excessive level of self-assurance, *nihonjinron* issued a serious challenge to the assumption of universal history and Western cultural hegemony.

In the Chinese new nationalistic discourse, the West appears primarily as a hostile competitor. Historically, it was Western imperial powers that forced the Chinese to get out of the imagined castle of the Central Kingdom. In this respect, the Chinese imagination of their national self and the world has also been deeply related to the West. In this regard, Wang (1998:11) notes that modernization has been conventionally understood by Chinese intellectuals as a “process of reevaluating their society and tradition against the yardstick of Western society and its cultures and values.” And he adds that this is one of the reasons why the contemporary Chinese discourses on modernity are “located within the ‘China /West’ and ‘tradition / modernity’ binaries” (*ibid*).

Chinese early modern history afflicted by imperialism and colonialism remained as a humiliating memory for the Chinese. In this context, the early Chinese modernizers’ aspiration for national greatness at the turn of the twentieth century continued through the early period of People’s Republic of China (Zhao 1997). A primary goal of Mao
Zedong’s socialist project was to build a strong socialist nation. With regard to the West, Mao stressed the need for narrowing the economic gap with the West, as was well expressed in his call in 1949 for “catching up to Great Britain and the United States” (Zhao 1997:726). The Chinese in the Mao era believed that they could build a better stronger country than Western capitalist ones through a different route, i.e., socialist development.

The image of the West for the Chinese has varied according to different domestic and global circumstances. In the 1980s, when China launched economic reform and opening policies, the West tended to be idealized especially by anti-traditional liberal intellectuals. Being critical of Chinese socialism for the nation’s economic backwardness, those intellectuals asked for the political economic reforms by modeling after the West. The Western-learning mood was high in this context as was expressed in such phrases as “cultural fever” (wenhua re) and the “new enlightenment movement” during the 1980s (Zhao 1997; Wang 1998). This intellectual trend tended to regard the Western-style capitalist society as an important reference for Chinese modernity in terms of such aspects as “the establishment of autonomy and freedom in the economic, political, legal, and cultural spheres” (Wang 1998:19). In this vein, they were generally critical of state authoritarianism and Chinese tradition.

The new nationalistic discourse arose from a sense of crisis about Chinese identity caused by the anti-traditional atmosphere. Criticizing the previous intellectual trend for romanticizing the West without much empirical knowledge about it, the new discourse promoted the “de-romanticization of the West” (Zhao 1997). The degree of
discrepancy in the interpretation of the West between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the general public was far reduced when it came to the new nationalistic discourse in the 1990s. The West in the new discourse was portrayed basically as a hostile entity that had an intention of tackling China’s bid for a strong country. As it attributed, to some degree, the collapse of the Soviet Union to Western conspiracy led by the U.S., the new nationalism strongly supported the centralized power structure of the CCP in order to “maintain social stability and economic development” (Zhao 1997:732). New nationalistic discourse argued that the Chinese should realize the true nature of the West. The nationalistic publications charged with anti-Western or anti-American sentiments, such as Zhongguo keri shuo bu (The China That Can Say No), made bestsellers. This intellectual mood went in tandem with the state-led patriotic education campaign launched in 1993, which “laid out patriotism as a guiding principle for China’s educational reform” (Zhao 2004:218). Asian values, which were disregarded by the “cultural fever” intellectuals, were reevaluated in this period in terms of China’s socio-economic development.

In the new nationalistic discourse, the West tends to be portrayed as having affluent economy, yet, with poor culture. It is suspected as hiding imperial intentions somewhat similar to those of the colonial era, and as creating unfair game rules to China by using its economic and military powers. Global conflicts are often attributed to Western conflictive and binary worldviews. Upon this, new nationalist discourses raise a need for enhancing harmonious Chinese cultural heritages and emphasize China’s role in building a better world. In this context, as Zheng (1999:80) notes, new nationalists
promote the argument that “it is time to change the rule of game-playing produced by the Western civilization.”

THE PERCEPTIONS OF SELF NATIONAL IDENTITY

In the hierarchical framework of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, Korea’s self-identity is based upon a sense of advancement over hujin’guk and a feeling of lacking over sŏnjin’guk. On the supposedly universal path of development, Korea is considered as having moved from the status of hujin’guk towards that of sŏnjin’guk. Korea is now frequently considered as almost sŏnjin’guk, or “on the threshold of sŏnjin’guk” (sŏnjin’guk munt’ŏk). Under the influence of modernization theory in the Cold War context, Korea’s early developmental regime did not hesitate to define their nation as hujin’guk and sought for their legitimacy from the vigorous efforts for escaping from it. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Korea’s self identity degraded to hujin’guk in the discourse of sŏnjin’guk from munmyŏng-guk (civilized country) in the discourse of munmyŏng (civilization) prevalent in the pre-developmental era. It is during the 1970s that Korean developmental elites started to perceive their country as having escaped from the status of hujin’guk, and when it came to the late 1970s, they began to designate it as in top-tier of chungjin’guk (developing country between sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk) or being close to the rank of sŏnjin’guk.
Korea’s prominent national identity has been constructed in relation to sŏnjin’guk in the developmental context. Since their incorporation into the Eurocentric world order, Koreans have evaluated various aspects of their society in the light of the West. Korea is now represented as almost sŏnjin’guk but somewhat short of full-fledged sŏnjin’guk. This self perception provides Koreans with a source of both pride and shame. On the one hand, Koreans feel a great sense of pride in their achievement of the status of “almost sŏnjin’guk” in such a short period, which is assumed as having taken hundreds of years by the West. Developmental elites tend to argue that this is due to the previous generations’ blood, sweat, and tears, and that it is our generations’ responsibility to make the nation a full-fledged sŏnjin’guk. They argue that Korea should not fall back into the status of hujin’guk in today’s competitive global political economic circumstances. On the other hand, Koreans’ national identity also gives a sense that Korea is, yet, short of sŏnjin’guk, which creates a ground for their tendency of self-orientalization. In this framework, Koreans perceive many aspects of their society as somewhat irrational, immature, and abnormal vis-à-vis the rational, mature, normal aspects of sŏnjin’guk. By continuously comparing their country with sŏnjin’guk, Koreans show a certain degree of “inferiority complex” and “double consciousness,” which are typical among colonized people (Fanon 1967; Du Bois 1994). In this perception, Korean society tends to remain merely as the lacking unauthentic copy of the sufficient authentic sŏnjin’guk.

In the discourse of nihonjinron, the Japanese national self appears noticeably as different, unique, and superior vis-à-vis the West. The national self is also represented
as homogeneous, harmonious, and inherent in Japan’s geographic conditions, which
takes on excessive ethnocentric implications. As noted above, the sense of uniqueness
reflected in *nihonjinron* is based upon a certain degree of confidence that they have
already achieved what the West has. Recognizing the weaknesses of Western countries
especially in social and cultural aspects, such as social conflict, high crime rate, extreme
individualism, etc., *nihonjinron* theorists tend to emphasize Japanese strengths vis-à-vis
the West. In this perception, what is considered as “different” is in no way regarded as
an obstacle to Japan’s development. Rather, as Befu (2001:68) points out, it is argued
that “Japan became an economic giant because of what Japan is.”

As noted above, the Japanese sense of superiority reflected in *nihonjinron* is an
intellectual attitude conscious of the West. Since their encounter with the West in the
mid-nineteenth century, the Japanese have made significant efforts to transform their
society to cope with the West. These are well shown in historical incidents such as their
endeavors to renew unequal treaties with Western countries in the late nineteenth
century; the promotion of war time slogan for “overcoming modernity” in the early and
mid-twentieth century; and self-criticism related to the defeat of war after the mid-
twentieth century. As the West has been the Japanese most significant other throughout
their modern history, *nihonjinron* can be understood as a self-conscious nationalistic
discourse aimed to overcome Western hegemony. In a similar vein, it is an effort to
overcome the modern Eurocentric cultural framework, in which Japan tends to be
located outside of universal history. In this regard, it is a movement of resistance to
refuse to locate the Japanese national self and their history within the Eurocentric hierarchical framework.

The Chinese new nationalistic discourse puts their national self mainly in a position to compete with the West, which is suspected as an interrupter of the Chinese project for building a strong nation. The new nationalism is a counter movement to the previous anti-traditional pro-Western discursive movement that assumed China’s lacking position vis-à-vis an idealized West. The anti-traditional trend of “cultural fever” in the 1980s was based upon the “criticism of traditional Chinese culture and criticism of Chinese national character” (Zhao 1997). In contrast, the new nationalism asserts that China has been pursuing a different path of socialist development, incorporating Chinese tradition and culture into it. It is based upon an assumption that China can build a strong, wealthy country with socialist characteristics, which are more desirable than Western capitalist countries. Choosing socialist paths to development, the Chinese started a different game that was set not by the West but by themselves.

Through the discourse of new nationalism, the Chinese express a good amount of confidence in their national identity. Recognizing that China in the past suffered from Western imperialism and was backward in national development, the new nationalism argues that this should be no longer the case in the future. It perceives that China’s recent economic growth has rendered it a different national status on the international stage. Furthermore, it argues that the West has already exposed its weakness in many aspects, manifest of which are its conflictive, exploitative, and unequal social, political economic relationships. Against these shortcomings, the new nationalism supposes their
national self as responsible for developing an alternative political socio-economic model globally as well as domestically, which is more harmonious, distributive, and equal. The Chinese slogan of “peaceful rise” can be understood in this context, which is a response to the “China threat” theories promoted by some realist political scholars in the U.S. With regard to this, Sheng Hong, a high-profile new nationalist scholar, argues that “China’s new nationalism should not aim at hegemonism, but the elimination of hegemonism” (Zheng 1999:85).

Another ground for the confidence of new nationalism in China’s contribution to a better world is its rich cultural heritage. The Chinese pride in their cultural legacy has, in some aspects, become a basis for their “cultural nationalism,” which argues that “the dominance of Western culture in international cultural exchanges was threatening the cultures of [. . .] China” (Zhao 1997:735). With the rise of cultural nationalism, “Western learning fever” in the 1980s was replaced by “Chinese / Confucius learning fever” (guoxue re) in their search for “Chineseness” (ibid.). The “Mao fever” of the 1990s also reflected this intellectual atmosphere, as the New Left tried to reevaluate him by saying, for instance, that “Maoism’s contribution to China’s economic growth lies in its collectivism” (Zheng 1999:62).
As a highly contested and subjective concept, modernity is understood differently across time and space. Rather than universally given, modernity is constructed reflecting not only society’s material conditions but also its collective values, worldviews, and identities. It can be argued that dominant features of modernity in a society reflect its dominant collective subjectivity, which is subject to continuous contestations among society members. In this respect, the three East Asian countries’ subjectivities of their modernities reflect their perceptions of self identities and the world, and their imaginations of national future. On this ground, this section pays attention to how each country differently or similarly defines its self and the world in terms of its perception of modernity.

Even though modernization theory lost its authority in the academia of development studies, its influence is still strong in the public in many aspects. For instance, the discourse of 손진'국 still echoes the theory’s basic assumption of a universal linear development path. It is interesting to note that the Korean discourse of 손진'국 has not changed its basic conceptual framework characterized by the binary distinction since its formation in the 1960s, in spite of the historical changes of domestic and global circumstances. In this framework, various aspects of Western societies tend to be presented as the universally applicable archetype. Diverse social systems are not much appreciated and even considered somewhat aberrant from the putative normal path to modernity. As 희진'국 is represented as the backward,
undesirable past of the advanced status of sŏnjin’guk, the distinction entails an epistemic hierarchy between the two. In the discourse, sŏnjin’guk monopolizes the romanticized notion of modernity. Thus, the modernity of sŏnjin’guk is considered as what is yet to be achieved by non- sŏnjin’guk. In those respects, the discourse of sŏnjin’guk rather maintains the conventional Eurocentric framework of modernity.

The discourse of sŏnjin’guk has not, yet, been homogeneous across time. Before the 1990s, the concept of sŏnjin’guk was used in the context of the kŭndaehwa (literally modernization) project under the authoritarian developmental regime, which supposed industrialization as the primary aspect of modernization. Since the 1990s, the concept has been employed in relation to different discourses, such as segyehwa (globalization) and sŏnjinhwa (achieving advancement), which aim to make the nation a full-fledged sŏnjin’guk in the wake of its successful achievements of industrialization and democratization.\(^5\) In relation to this, the discourse of sŏnjin’guk tends to see that the Korean modernization process in the past was very rapid and, thus, not mature enough. It assumes that Korea has achieved in just a few decades what the West has experienced through hundreds of years, and that some aspects of Korean society do not deserve a full-fledged sŏnjin’guk yet.\(^5\)

\(^5\) Park Seil (2006), a prominent proponent of sŏnjinhwa today, argues that having achieved two important goals of modernization, kŭndaehwa and minjuhwa (democratization), Korea has now to pursue sŏnjinhwa.

\(^5\) In the perspective of “modernities,” the discourse’s Eurocentric assumption of linear path of development from hujin’guk to sŏnjin’guk is disputed. From this point of view, Korean modernization process has its own characteristics reflecting its own distinctive historical circumstances, which is distinguished from those of the West, and thus should not be understood in such universal sequential notions. What Korea achieved in such a short period is, in fact, not so much a speedy tracking of what the West has undergone ahead, as the result of its own unique historical experiences.
Unlike the Korean case, Japanese discourses on modernity well recognize their “uniqueness.” With regard to this, two perspectives are prominent: one tends to understand Japanese modernity with the conceptual framework of “non-modernity” and the other with “postmodernity” (Miyoshi and Harootunian 1989; Clammer 1995; McCormack and Sugimoto 1988). In either perspective, it is assumed that Japanese society has achieved what is regarded by Westerners as modernity through different or unique social, cultural processes, resulting in a society hard to be understood with the conventional Eurocentric concepts of modernity and modernization. This kind of conceptualizations of Japanese experiences of modernity is an effort to place their society outside of Eurocentric historiography. With regard to this, Clammer (2001:39) notes that “not only was Japan a postmodern society, but that it was also the only one yet to emerge (and as such the pioneer, well ahead of the West [. . .]).” He goes on to say that “in some sense it always had been postmodern” (ibid.). In this way, the Eurocentric periodical distinction between the premodern, the modern, and the postmodern becomes blurred. In relation to this, Clammer (2001:50) argues that Japan is “the one society which has passed directly from pre-modernity to postmodernity without passing through modernity at all [. . .].”

As noted above, many Japanese scholars refuse to locate their historical experience within the Eurocentric periodical framework. In this regard, Takeuchi Yoshimi, for instance, argues that “[m]odernity is the self-recognition of Europe, the recognition of Europe’s modern self as distinct from her feudal self [. . .]” (cited in Sakai 1989). To include Japan in history imagined by the West means to consign Japan
to be a “perpetually incomplete version of the West” (Tanaka 1993:45). Therefore, rather than trying to fit the Japanese case into the Western periodization, they choose to emphasize its “uniqueness” and “difference” vis-à-vis the West.

It is interesting to note that postmodern discourses and nihonjinron gained popularity around the same time in the 1980s. In spite of the fundamental difference in nature between the decentralizing, heterogenizing postmodern discourses and the centralizing, homogenizing nihonjinron, the two shares in common their focus on the difference and uniqueness of Japanese society from the West. In this respect, Iida (2002:200) appropriately points out that “although nihonjinron discourse runs seemingly counter to these latter trends [of postmodernism], it also has ‘postmodern’ components.” While postmodern discourses interpret Japanese society as “postmodern” with an awareness of Western theorization, nihonjinron construes it with the ethnocentrically charged notion of “intrinsic uniqueness.” The latter can especially be understood as a kind of “nationalistic sentiments calling for the recovery of Japan’s ‘true identity’ supposedly erased by the process of modernization / Westernization” (Iida 2002:205).

The 1980s witnessed the discourses of Japanese uniqueness and postmodernity at the peak. As McCormack and Sugimoto (1988:13) notes, “Japan in the 1980s is embarking on the path toward a postmodern society.” According to them, there are two notable periods when Japan has declared the transcendence of modernity as an official state project in its modern era: “first under Premier Tōjō Hideki in 1942 and more recently under Premier Ōhira Masayoshi in 1979 [. . .]” (McCormack and Sugimoto
1988:13). The former appeared in the wartime context, and the latter in the context of the Japanese regaining of confidence from the identity crisis after the war. The state-supported volumes entitled *Beyond the Modern Age (Kindai o Koete)* published in 1983, which was dedicated to the late Prime Minister Ohira, stated that “we have come to the age in which one must go beyond the modern, and we must shift from an economic-centered to a culture-centered age” (cited in Iida 2002:166). According to this, Iida (2002:166) notes, “the problems of the modern age, such as the exploitation of nature, an excess of freedom, and the lack of spirituality, are essentially caused by the rationalism and materialism inherent in Western civilization.”

That Ohira was a main political figure supportive of *nihonjinron* shows a link between postmodern discourses and the nationalistic discourse. Focusing on the “uniqueness” of Japan, *nihonjinron* is sympathetic to the interpretation of its society as postmodern. Many aspects of Japanese society, such as pastiche and eclecticism in cultural artifacts, “de-centered subject” in individual perception of self, and collectivism in social organizations, are considered as containing various elements of postmodernity (Clammer 1995, 2001). Furthermore, these unique or postmodern aspects of Japanese society are often regarded as superior to the decaying societal forms of the West. It is related to this context that Japanese society is idealized in *nihonjinron* as a harmonious, conflict-free, “relational” society. On this interpretive ground, a Japan-centered version of universalistic argument comes out that Japan has arrived first in a condition that the West has not reached yet (Miyoshi and Harootunian 1989; Clammer 1995).
Some *nihonjinron* theorists argue that Japan has always been postmodern as it did not follow the Western path of development. In this regard, the prefix “post” is rather understood as “beyond” than as “after.” As for this, Clammer (1995:15) notes that the “postmodern” is in some sense “the transcending (or undermining) of the whole notion of periodization” that characterizes the “Enlightenment project’ to control or even create reality by categorizing and defining it.” It is assumed that Japan has achieved what are thought of as major characteristics of modernity, such as industrialization, urbanization, and technologization, while maintaining their central cultural values. In this regard, some argue that the material conditions of Japanese society are at a similar level to those of the West, but the characteristics of its social system look more comparable to those of India (Clammer 1995, 2001). In this perspective, the conventional distinction between the traditional and the modern is highly blurred with Japanese society. It is also recognized that Japanese traditional values served well for Japan’s successful modernization by promoting national harmony and unity (Jansen 1965; Hall 1965). In this sense, Japanese society is a fine example challenging “the legitimacy of imposing on another society a periodization of history itself developed in the west” (Clammer 1995:15).

The Chinese discourse of new nationalism reflects their notion of “alternative modernity.” In this notion, the Chinese have undergone an “alternative path” to Eurocentric modernity through “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” In this way, the Chinese refuse to identify modernity with capitalism. Furthermore, they claim to build a better societal system upon the recognition of the limitations of Western
capitalist modernity. The Chinese new nationalism argues that the capitalist form of modernity contains conflictive, discriminative, and exploitative relationships among people as well as between people and nature. In this regard, Sheng Hong, a representative new nationalistic theorist, argues for the superiority of Chinese culture, saying that “[because] each religion in [Western civilization] worshipped only one god, war and competition were inevitable” (Zhao 1997:737-8). He goes further to argue that “[i]n the context of religious conflict and competition, social Darwinism was developed,” and thus “Western culture [would] lead humanity into catastrophe” (ibid.:738). In this respect, the new nationalism argues that the Chinese should pursue an alternative to this by combining efficient socialist reform with their traditional cultural values. According to the new nationalism, the Chinese modernization project aims to achieve an equal, distributive, and harmonious society. As for the importance of Chinese cultural heritage in this regard, Sheng Hong argues that “Confucian respect for universal harmony and collectivism in Chinese culture should be especially instrument for world peace and development” (ibid.).

As such, the concept of modernity for the Chinese new nationalism does not just mean economic prosperity and high technology, but includes harmonious and egalitarian Chinese cultural values. It also believes that “traditional culture could play an important role in robust economic growth” (Zhao 1997:739). This is supported by the discussions of “Confucian capitalism,” which no longer sees Confucianism as an obstacle to economic development, but a vital factor for it. In those respects, the Chinese concept of modernity is in competition with the Eurocentric notion of
modernity. Ultimately, they aim to overcome the West by achieving their ideal of “alternative modernity.” As Wang (1998) notes, “new collectivism” and “the theory of rural enterprise-led modernization” are the specific examples of experiments for China’s different path to modernity. He argues that Chinese modernity should not put emphasis just on “efficiency,” which is the central theme of Western modernity, but should also focus on the values of political participation, economic equality, and the protection of the environment (Wang 1998).

The new nationalist understanding of Chinese modernity reflects Chinese ambition to restore the “glory of the Chinese past.” It is assumed that achieving harmonious socialist society with national wealth and strength is an ultimate way to win the competition with Western capitalist modernity. As such, the new nationalist concept of modernity poses a serious challenge to the Eurocentric notion of modernity. In this regard, Tian (2005a:3) argues for the adoption of “market socialism” in which “the market is the means for developing a productive force, and the goal is to build socialism.” Reflecting his confidence and optimism in the Chinese path, Tian (2005b:298) also argues that there is a difference between Chinese alternative modernity and Western liberal modernity in the sense that “the former is more universal and more thoroughgoing than the latter.”
CONCLUSION

This chapter has comparatively examined the perceptions of national self and the West, and the subjectivities of modernities reflected in the discourses of Korean sŏnjin 'guk, Japanese nihonjinron, and Chinese new nationalism. It has shown that the three Asian countries’ dominant discourses on modern self and the world are based upon different perceptual frameworks despite their regional proximity. In terms of the perception of the West, the sŏnjin 'guk discourse considers it mainly an advanced being, which Korea and other societies are to pursue. With the dualistic distinction between sŏnjin 'guk and hujin 'guk, it gives a certain degree of respect to the West by designating it as sŏnjin 'guk in general. On a presumed universal path of development from hujin 'guk to sŏnjin 'guk, Korea is frequently posited on the threshold of the rank of sŏnjin 'guk, which renders both positive and negative self-identity for Koreans. In terms of the perception of modernity, the Korean discourse remains, in general, within the conventional Eurocentric notion of modernity.

The Japanese discourse of nihonjinron, in contrast, shows strong self-confidence. In this discourse, the West is represented as having many weaknesses in their societies and lacking many positive aspects of Japanese society. Interpreting the superiority of Japanese society as deriving from Japanese intrinsic uniqueness, nihonjinron makes an effort to enhance a sort of ethnocentric Japanese national identity. In this context, it refuses to posit Japanese society within the Eurocentric conceptual framework of modernity. Rather, it tends to interpret Japanese society as non-modern or postmodern,
which has many merits over Western societies. In those respects, the Japanese 
nihonjinron discourse offers a serious challenge to European cultural hegemony.

The Chinese discourse of new nationalism arose out of the sense of identity 
crisis deriving from the liberal intellectual trend that tended to idealize the West. Thus, 
the new nationalism tries to reassure the nature of the West as a main competitor for 
China, denying its romanticization. Arguing that Chinese identity was eroded by the 
liberals’ blind pursuit of Western-style modernity, it aims to reemphasize Chinese 
socialist values as well as their cultural heritages. It recognizes the insufficiency of 
Chinese economy, which raises the need for the adoption of the market economy for 
productive forces, but is also aware of the merits of their cultural values in building a 
better society in competition with the West. Reflecting that the Chinese has long 
pursued “alternative modernity” through socialism with Chinese characteristics, the new 
nationalism asserts that the Chinese has been going on the right track of modernity. As 
for this, it argues that Chinese alternative modernity is closer to true universal values, 
such as equality and harmony, compared with exploitative Western capitalist modernity.

In terms of self national identity vis-à-vis the West, it can be generally said that 
Koreans stick to the notion of “catch-up,” the Japanese to “uniqueness,” and the 
Chinese to “alternative.” In the discourse of sŏnjin'guk, Koreans express a strong 
willingsness to accommodate the characteristics of Western societies by setting them as 
models of sŏnjin'guk. In contrast, the Chinese and the Japanese tend to maintain a 
distance from the West in their identity formation by setting it as a kind of lacking 
“other” to their self-identities. Unlike the Korean case, the Japanese nativist values have
successfully gone through the challenges from universalistic values within Japanese society, such as capitalist liberalism and socialism (Bellah 1974). In the case of China, traditional values were harshly oppressed under the universalistic value of socialism in its early revolutionary era, but have recently been reevaluated, as is reflected in the “Chinese / Confucius learning fever” of the new nationalism.

From a global perspective, all of the three discourses expose crucial weaknesses. First of all, the Korean discourse does not pay much attention to the limitations of Western modernity, circumscribing Koreans within the Eurocentric imagination of the world. Within the framework of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, Koreans are hard to realize that the world is far more connected and interactive than they imagine. In this respect, the Korean discourse does not contribute much to challenging the Eurocentric epistemic hierarchy, and to building a more diverse and harmonious world. The Japanese nihonjinron discourse contains a different kind of problem. Even though it shows a strong resistance to Eurocentric notions, nihonjinron presents extremely ethnocentric versions of nationalism and worldviews. In this respect, some theorists criticize it as an “essentializing, totalizing, ethnocentric and possibly even racist discourse” (Clammer 2001:66; Dale 1986; Befu 1993, 2001). The Chinese new nationalism also has various elements of excessive nationalism and ethnocentrism. Therefore, there is a need for more active cross-cultural dialogues in the light of the new nationalism. In this regard, Zhao (1997:744) insists that “Chinese intellectuals have yet to find their way to forms of cross-cultural dialogue in which the Chinese and Westerners may more critically understand themselves in the light of each other.”
This chapter has argued that the three neighboring countries in East Asia have different views of national self and the West, as well as different subjectivities of their modernity from one another. These different self identities and worldviews are deeply related to their imaginations of the future of their country and to their ways of interacting with the world. In terms of the trend of globalization, this suggests a cultural background of those countries’ different attitudes and responses to globalization. In the historical context of “global rebalancing” (Nederveen Pieterse 2010), those countries have far more room than before for contributing to the trends of globalization. In this respect, I would argue that they should more seriously engage in reestablishing their self identities and worldviews, reflecting those important historical global trends.

Above all, people in those countries need to make continuous efforts to challenge and deconstruct Eurocentric worldviews. People should be able to resist unjust intentions of domination implicit in Eurocentric political, economic, social, and cultural ideas. However, they should also be cautious not to rely on another kind of particularistic ethnocentric notions for that purpose. I believe that East Asia has rich cultural traditions and heritages that are useful to enhancing truly universal values and constructing a better world.
CONCLUSION

This dissertation has examined the basic assumptions, characteristics, formation and transformation, and historical backgrounds of the discourse of sŏnjin‘guk, which is a dominant way of constructing developmental national self and worldviews for South Koreans. It has argued that the discourse of sŏnjin‘guk is a historically constructed knowledge system based upon the relations constructed around the concepts of sŏnjin‘guk (advanced country) and hujin‘guk (backward country). With a hierarchical classificatory system in which sŏnjin‘guk has hujin‘guk as its alienated other, the discourse has provided dominant interpretive frameworks of national identities and worldviews in South Korea’s national developmental processes. As an ideal image, sŏnjin‘guk has played important roles in guiding Koreans’ imaginations of national future and, thus, the transformation of their country, as an urgent national goal and an important reference point. By exploring the historicity of the discourse, this study has shown that the formation and transformation of the discourse of sŏnjin‘guk, whose assumptions are accepted somewhat universal, have reflected specific global and national historical circumstances in Korea’s modernization process. In this way, this study has problematized and historicized the universal bearings of the discourse and its taken-for-granted interpretive frameworks.

For its historical root, chapter one has analyzed the formation and transformation of the discourses of kaehwa (enlightenment) and munmyŏng (civilization) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the face of the Western imperial
expansion, Koreans felt a need for transforming their political economic, cultural, and social systems to maintain national sovereignty. Korean modern elites considered powerful Western societies as their models for reformation. In this situation, various aspects of Western societies tended to be idealized while many aspects of Korean tradition were stigmatized. The general image of the West abruptly changed from “barbarians” into “kaehwa-guk” (enlightened country) and “munmyŏng-guk” (civilized country), reflecting Eurocentric ideas of enlightenment and civilization. Thus, the discourses of kaehwa and munmyŏng reflected Korean modern intellectuals’ understandings of national self and the world in those times.

It has shown that Korea’s modern self identity changed from munmyŏng-guk in the 1880s, pan-kaehwa-guk (half-enlightened country) in the 1890s and the 1900s, to munmyŏng-guk again in the 1920s with different connotation, reflecting different global and national historical circumstances. While the 1890s and 1900s witnessed the peak of the idealized West as reflected in the concept of munmyŏng, the 1920s and 1930s observed a steep downfall of the image of the West in the wake of World War I, which accompanied the crisis of the global discourse of civilization. In this period, the connotations of munmyŏng also changed dramatically, recognizing the spiritual goodness of Eastern civilization over material Western civilization. Under the colonial rule, the moral superiority of Korean civilization was also emphasized over the aggressiveness of Japanese civilization. Thus, the basic Eurocentric frameworks constructed in the previous discourses of kaehwa and munmyŏng were seriously challenged in the 1920s and 30s.
Amidst the crisis of the discourse of civilization, the global discursive focus changed from “civilization” to “development” in the mid-twentieth century, with the rise of U.S. hegemony. Reflecting this, Koreans’ dominant ways of representing national identity and the world began to be formed in developmental terms. In this process, the discourse of munmyŏng gave way to that of sŏnjin’guk. In the new framework, the West took its advanced position again as sŏnjin’guk, while Korean national identity degraded from munmyŏng-guk to hujin’guk.

Chapter two has shown that the discourse of sŏnjin’guk is premised upon a developmental distinction between sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk. Various positive values, which are historically specific to Koreans, are associated with the former, while negative values with the latter. As such, those concepts are the constructions of Koreans themselves, rather than the faithful representations of reality. Despite the popularity of those concepts, this study has shown that they are used in loose terms, indicating different entities in different contexts. As an ideal representation, sŏnjin’guk plays important roles in guiding national development, as a point of direction, a standard of comparison, a desirable model, a reference point, etc. It tends to represent the desirable change and future of Korea. In contrast, hujin’guk plays roles as an undesirable being, which Korea should not resemble in its development process. Currently, South Korea generally identifies itself as very close to sŏnjin’guk, and tries to concentrate national energy on achieving the status of full-fledged sŏnjin’guk in the near future.

In chapter three, this study has examined the historical variation of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk throughout the postwar period. The discourse has modified its connotation
and political implication according to the change of historical conditions since its rise as a dominant discursive system supporting the hegemony of South Korean developmental regime in the 1960s. As a developmental discourse, the discourse of sŏnjin’guk provided an interpretive system for South Korean national development, and gave legitimacy to the developmental regime’s pursuit of economic growth. By designating Korea as hujin’guk, the discourse made it a historical necessity to transform the country towards sŏnjin’guk. In this context, escaping the status of hujin’guk gained consensus in the general public as an urgent national goal in the 1960s and 70s. The discourse played an important role as a dominant interpretive framework in providing a motivation for South Korea’s rapid economic growth. In this way, it also gave support to the legitimacy of the South Korean developmental regime.

From the late 1960s, there appeared a perception that Korea had escaped the status of hujin’guk, reflecting Koreans’ confidence in their rapid economic growth. In the 1970s, Koreans more frequently designated their country as chungjin’guk or kaebaldo-sang-guk (developing country), and began to identify it as an advanced kaebaldo-sang-guk or being close to sŏnjin’guk in the mid-1970s. In the 1980s, national identity as one of NICs (Newly Industrializing Countries) was prevalent. Until the 1970s, the concept of sŏnjin’guk was used in somewhat limited terms, e.g., advanced being in industrialization or capitalist development. It was not necessarily considered as advanced in other fields such as culture. South Koreans were aware of that their national interests, as developing country, were different from those of sŏnjin’guk. Furthermore, various negative side-effects accompanying industrialization were well
recognized. In this respect, a sense of wariness on becoming sŏnjin’guk was often expressed by intellectuals.

It was the 1980s when the concept of sŏnjin’guk began to be rapidly idealized. In the process of adjusting to the international pressure to open national market, South Korean ruling elites began to promote the market opening as a precondition for achieving sŏnjin’guk. In a similar vein, a tendency of considering the transformation of Korean society in international terms became strong. This tendency came to be far manifest near the Seoul Olympic Games in 1988, and accompanying this was the idealization of the concept of sŏnjin’guk. The discourse’s Eurocentric bearing further intensified in the 1990s when the South Korean developmental regime actively adopted the global discourse of neoliberal globalization. While the national identity of “near sŏnjin’guk” was prevalent, the Kim Young-Sam administration actively promoted the project of segyehwa (globalization) as a way to achieve the status of full sŏnjin’guk. The aspiration to become sŏnjin’guk is well expressed in the term sŏnjinhwga (achieving advancement) today. On this historical ground, it is interesting to note that Korea has been in the status of “just in front of sŏnjin’guk” for more than thirty years.

In chapter four, this study has argued that the discourse of sŏnjin’guk has been challenged and contested by various counter-developmentalist socio-economic groups. There are apparent differences in attitude towards the basic assumptions and political implications of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk between the promoters of the discourse and the counter-developmentalist groups. There are also a considerable degree of resistances to the discourse’s ways of interpreting the world. All interviewees from those groups
refuse to accept the validity of the distinction between sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk in certain ways. The different understandings of the discursive system lead to different understandings of national identities and visions. In this respect, the slogan of sŏnjinhwa and its various policies are criticized as mainly reflecting the interests of ruling groups. However, those resistances to the discourse of sŏnjin’guk are not yet developed to the active movements of presenting alternative interpretive frameworks for development.

The last chapter has provided a comparative view on the discourse of sŏnjin’guk in transnational terms. Through the comparative analysis of dominant discourses in Korea, China, and Japan, it has demonstrated that each country has distinctive self national identities and perceptions of the West, despite their regional proximity. With regard to the perception of the West, Koreans tend to regard it as an advanced entity on a supposedly universal development path. In contrast, the Japanese and the Chinese tend to perceive it somewhat lacking and hostile respectively in relation to their national identities. In terms of national self vis-à-vis the West, Koreans consider themselves as somewhat insufficient, while the Japanese focus on their uniqueness and the Chinese on their potential alternativeness. And, in regard to the subjectivity of modernities, the Koreans show a typical Eurocentric paradigm of modernity. In contrast, the Japanese emphasize non-modernity and postmodernity, and the Chinese focus on alternative modernity with socialist characteristics. I consider that these differences in national identity vis-à-vis the West affect those countries’ basic attitudes in their international
politics. For instance, having the most humble self identity towards the West among the three, Korea shows relatively more accommodative stance to neoliberal globalization.

Main contributions of the findings and arguments of this study can be considered in terms of global studies, cultural studies, development studies, and Korean studies. First, this study has demonstrated how global hegemonic transitions affected Korea’s national discursive formations and transformations. While previous research on the global discursive influence on national developmental situation is rare, this study has shown the significance of global discursive change in its impact on national discourses, with the case of Korea. In this regard, it has found that Korean discursive change from *kaehwa* and *munmyǒng* to *sŏnjin’guk* corresponds to that from “civilization” to “development” at the global level. This study has displayed a non-Western country’s adjusting process to the Eurocentric world order, with a focus on discursive formation and transformation.

Second, this study has examined South Korea’s modernization process from a cultural perspective, focusing on the formation and transformation of dominant discourses. Despite scholarly curiosity about South Korea’s economic “miracle,” research on background knowledge system underlying the “miracle” is rare. Previous cultural research on East Asian economic growth mainly remains around its relationship with the Confucian tradition. In this respect, a contribution of this study is to expand cultural research on Asian economic development to specific developmental discourse and ideology at the national level. It has argued that the discourse of *sŏnjin’guk* was a dominant discourse that provided legitimacy to the Korean developmental regime and
its active drive for national economic development and modernization. For this, it has employed various cultural theories and a methodology of discourse analysis to investigate the formation and transformation of Koreans’ collective mentality, reflected in major newspaper texts.

Third, this study has analyzed the interactions between global and national development discourses. It has paid attention to the importance of developmental discourse supporting developmental regime, in understanding a country’s developmental transformation. Under the global hegemony of the West, South Korea’s national development projects were deeply influenced by global discourses with Eurocentric implications. This study has found that Eurocentric interpretive paradigms are still deeply ingrained in the South Korean public’s worldview. In many ways, they are taken for granted as universal common sense. In this respect, this study has shown a need for research on the cultural effect of developmentalism on the transformation of societies. Even though modernization theory, for instance, lost its appeal as a valid development theory in academia, its basic assumptions and ideas are still effective in mainstream public discourse of Korea. It has displayed that Korea’s national developmental slogans and projects such as kūndaehwa (modernization), segyehwa (globalization), and currently sŏnjinhwŏ (achieving advancement) have been supported by developmental discourses such as that of sŏnjin ’guk. This situation raises a need for researchers to engage more actively with the influence of Eurocentric developmental ideas on society.
And last, this study is important in understanding the history of Korea’s adaptation to the Eurocentric world order. Facing “external shock” from the Western expansion, Korea felt a need for its transformation modeling the West in the late nineteenth century. Under the global discourse of civilization, Koreans constructed the discourses of *kaehwa* and *mummyŏng* as a way to interpret the newly emerging world order. A number of researches have pointed out Eurocentric elements embedded in those early modern discourses. However, strangely enough, research on Koreans’ Eurocentric discursive construction reflecting the new Eurocentric global order in the postwar era is very rare. In this respect, this study has filled the research gap in the postwar period, by demonstrating that the discourse of *sonjin’guk* is an equivalent to the previous *kaehwa* and *mummyŏng* discourses in terms of Koreans’ construction of national identities and worldviews vis-à-vis the West. In relation to this, this study is also significant in terms of the research on Eurocentrism in Korea. In this regard, it has demonstrated the interconnectedness between developmentalism and Eurocentrism in Korea, through the analysis of the discourse of *sonjin’guk* as a dominant public Eurocentric developmental discourse.

In a practical sense, I hope this study could contribute to deconstructing the West for reconstruction (Chakrabarty 2000; Nederveen Pieterse 2001/2009). Nederveen Pieterse (2001), for instance, appropriately raises a need for deconstructing the West for a multipolar global circumstance. In this regard, he mentions that:
Developmentalism is not merely a policy of economic and social change, or a philosophy of history. It reflects the ethos of Western culture and is intimately intertwined with Western history and culture. Ultimately the problem of developmentalism cannot be settled in terms of political economy, nor in terms of social philosophy, the critique of ideas or unpacking discourse; it requires a profound historical and cultural review of the Western project. This task we might term the deconstruction of the West [. . .]. (Nederveen Pieterse 2001:32)

For Nederveen Pieterse, the deconstruction of the West is an effort to return it to an equal part of world history, which has been so far obfuscated by Eurocentrism. For him, the total negation of certain discursive frameworks is neither possible nor desirable given the hybrid nature of global history. As the conventional concept of “development” reflects Western ethos, he argues for the need for deconstruction of “development,” and adds that it is the “prerequisite for its reconstruction.” For him, the need for reconstruction is raised as a pluralist project, which values the diverse processes of development reflecting each society’s cultural and historical contexts. This does not necessarily mean relativism, in which the judgment of desirable values tends to be withheld. In this respect, he notes that “[t]he middle way between universalism and relativism is pluralism” (Nederveen Pieterse 2001:33).

Based upon the findings of this study, I would like to think about the contribution of the sŏnjin’guk discourse to the transformation of Korea so far, and its implication in Korea’s future development. The discourse of sŏnjin’guk began to be discursively formed in the 1960s, accompanying the formation of the South Korean developmental regime led by Park Chung-Hee. Even though the terms sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk had been sometimes used before, it was not until this period when they were somewhat systematically arranged to form a knowledge system determining South
Korean national identities and worldviews. Amidst the rise of global developmental discourses, which made an issue of the “development of underdeveloped regions” in the Cold War context, the formation of the sŏnjin’guk discourse was deeply influenced by those global discourses, e.g., modernization theory. Reflecting the global discourses’ distinction between the “developed” and the “underdeveloped,” or the “modern” and the “traditional,” the South Korean discourse distinguished sŏnjin’guk from hujin’guk on a universal path of progress. Amidst the harsh anti-communist policies of the Park regime, there was not much room for critical development theories, e.g., dependency theory, to be reflected in the formation of the sŏnjin’guk discourse. In this way, the discourse of sŏnjin’guk took on Eurocentric inclination from the beginning.

Despite its Eurocentric tendency, however, the sŏnjin’guk discourse did not necessarily idealize the West before the 1980s. In those times, the West represented by sŏnjin’guk was regarded as advanced only in terms of industrialization or capitalist development. As noted above, various negative side-effects accompanying industrial development were well recognized by South Koreans. In this respect, the use of sŏnjin’guk was quite limited to referring to the industrially advanced country. Furthermore, sŏnjin’guk was used in distinction from the concept of munmyŏng-guk (civilized country), which referred to either materially or spiritually rich country. That is to say, the concept of sŏnjin’guk implied the materially rich country but did not necessarily mean spiritual advancement. In this respect, the status of sŏnjin’guk was often compared with that of Korea as munmyŏng-guk, whose cultural richness was still appreciated despite its material poverty.
In those respects, it is hard to say that the discourse of sŏnjin’guk was entirely Eurocentric before the 1980s. In this context, sŏnjin’guk was set as the entity to “catch up” in terms of industrialization, but the South Korean developmental regime did not necessarily follow Westernization. Despite their pro-West tendency, South Korean developmentalists showed strong nationalistic attitudes, and approached the West somewhat carefully in many aspects. Considering that the West or sŏnjin’guk had different interests from Korea, they were wary of its political economic intentions on the international stage. For instance, the Park regime showed a cautious attitude toward foreign capital in this context (Koo and Kim 1992:127). Therefore, it would be more appropriate to say that the South Korean developmental regime under Park Chung-Hee was far more nationalistic than Eurocentric. This nationalistic attitude of the South Korean developmental regime began to get dim vis-à-vis Eurocentrism in the 1980s in different global and national circumstances.

In political economic terms, one of the most important roles of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk for the Park regime lay in providing a general knowledge system justifying the regime’s aggressive pursuit of economic development. Within the discursive framework, the nation’s economic growth was naturalized as a historical necessity of progress from hujin’guk to sŏnjin’guk. As such, the discourse of sŏnjin’guk gave legitimacy to the Park regime’s drive for economic development as the most urgent national goal. The discourse provided an intellectual ground for the national motivation for economic development. Western countries represented by sŏnjin’guk were set as the actual models for South Korea to “catch up” in the near future in its pursuit of the
national goal. In this respect, it can be said that the discourse of sŏnjin’guk played an important historical role in South Korea’s rapid economic development.

As a general knowledge system, the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, however, did not guide the country’s specific development policies. Rather, South Korea’s state-led rapid economic growth was clearly distinguished from the development paths of Western countries. In this respect, even though it set Western countries as the entities to catch up, South Korea did not exactly follow their models in its specific development strategies. For instance, even though the U.S. was the most frequently referred sŏnjin’guk at the time, the South Korean regime, rather, envisioned an ideal model of welfare state in its drive for economic growth. In relation to this, an important material ground for the legitimacy of the Korean developmental regime was that the economic growth accompanied the improvement of ordinary people’s quality of life. At the time, the majority of the Korean population directly experienced the improvement of material life led by the national economic growth, with a perception that their country was “developing” and eventually approaching sŏnjin’guk. The developmental regime’s authoritative social policies were, in large part, tolerated and consented in this context.

In this respect, it is important to note that the South Korean developmental regime was not just authoritarian, but capable of improving people’s material life.52 In relation to this, the ideal model of sŏnjin’guk was not the Anglo-Saxon liberal one, but that of sŏnjin pokji kukga (advanced welfare state). The issue of welfare was

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52 This historical experience is still an important factor in today’s South Korean politics. The election of President Lee Myung-Bak in 2007, who has an image of one of the most successful CEOs during the rapid economic growth period, reflects people’s continuous desire for steeper national economic growth and the tangible improvement of their material life.
discursively highlighted in relation to economic development, and the developmental regime promoted that economic growth would lead the country to a welfare state. The imaginary of sŏnjin’guk with welfare characteristics in the 1970s and 80s made a clear distinction from its current image centered on global competitiveness with neoliberal inclination.

Despite its contribution to Korea’s achievement of economic growth and modernization, the discourse of sŏnjin’guk exposes its limitations in various aspects in contemporary historical circumstances. From a practical point of view, it should be questioned whether the basic assumptions of the discourse, which provided legitimacy to the twentieth-century’s modernization process, are still useful in the contemporary and future contexts. Above all, the discourse basically assumes that South Korea is still chasing the West in a universal race of development. This shows that South Korea is still under a conventional notion of modernization project, when the limitations of the singular form of Western modernity and its developmental models have widely been recognized (Smith 1973; Webster 1984; Rist 1997; Nederveen Pieterse 1998, 2001; Mehmet 1999). A variety of movements are notable around the globe today to change our development foci from growth to more essential values such as sustainability, quality of life, subsidiarity, diversity, equity, etc. (International Forum on Globalization 2004).

In this respect, the discourse of sŏnjin’guk in its current form tends to circumscribe South Koreans’ imagination within a conventional modern paradigm, with a focus on GDP per capita. In a global sense, the Eurocentric hierarchical assumptions
of the discourse of sŏnjin 'guk tend to disregard the diversity of human society. Eurocentric discourses tend to suppose something essentially singular, pure, and disconnected, while the reality is rather plural, hybrid, and connected. As Koreans’ own construction, the discourse of sŏnjin 'guk rather relies on images than realities, and much information about sŏnjin 'guk and hujin 'guk is, in fact, ungrounded. In this respect, the discourse of sŏnjin 'guk hinders South Koreans’ contextual and historical understanding of realities. This raises a need for developing a contextual way of looking at the world, rather than masking the complexity of reality by confining it within the blanket concepts of sŏnjin 'guk and hujin 'guk. For instance, the Bhutanese pursuit of “Gross National Happiness” (Ura and Galay 2004) should be approached in their social and cultural contexts, rather than distorting the reality by designating them hujin 'guk and thus depriving them of their own identity. With regard to this, a future discourse should be able to open a possibility to South Koreans that they might have as many things to learn from, for instance, the Bhutanese as from the West.

In those respects, I would argue that it is the time for South Koreans to reconsider the concept of sŏnjin 'guk to establish a more socially and culturally oriented model for the future, which reflects the complexity and hybridity of the world, and values various forms of living around the globe. An important implication of the historical understanding of the discourse of sŏnjin 'guk is that it always recognizes the possibility of change. From a global perspective, a real paradox is that South Korea can never be a true sŏnjin 'guk with the current form of the discourse of sŏnjin 'guk. This is
because any country obsessed with Eurocentrism is not, and should not be, a true sŏnjin'guk in our future world.

This dissertation intends to problematize a taken-for-granted South Koreans’ developmental episteme, which naturalizes development centered on economic growth. As is reflected in the discourse of sŏnjin'guk, South Koreans are still obsessed with the increase of GDP per capita, and this obsession is politically appropriated by conservative ruling groups to maintain their legitimacy. In the contemporary context, the discourse of sŏnjin'guk tends to be associated with the global neoliberal trend, and promotes an argument that neoliberal transformation of the country is the only way to win global competition and to eventually become a full-fledged sŏnjin'guk. A practical implication of this study is that it is the time for South Koreans to critically evaluate their GDP-centered development notions. By various international criteria, South Korea is already economically developed enough (World Bank 2010b). In this respect, the South Korean sense of lacking in economic aspects is not as much externally conditioned as is derived from their own perceptions. Moreover, it should be recognized that various problems in the contemporary South Korean society, such as deepening socio-economic polarization, intense educational competition, low sense of happiness, etc, are not derived from that the nation is not yet a fully developed country, but that, in large part, it is still sticking to the GDP-centered concept of development. In this regard, the current concept of sŏnjin'guk can be a growth-centered illusion. Furthermore, the current tendency of universalizing Western developmental perspectives in the process
of pursuing sŏnjin’guk can cause a risk for South Korean society, as imperialism always takes on an air of universalism.

Therefore, I would suggest that South Koreans should seriously engage in reconstructing their notion of development and their vision of sŏnjin’guk in a way to reflect the merits and demerits of their own society. For this, it is the time for economic growth to go back to its proper position as a means rather than a goal. There are many priceless things on their own, such as communitarian and peace-loving traditions, which cannot be exchanged with economic growth. In this respect, the current form of the discourse of sŏnjin’guk tends to circumscribe their ability to imagine a different concept of development, by prioritizing economic growth indexed by GDP per capita. In order to overcome the limitation of imaginary, South Koreans need critical and historical ways of thinking about development. As for the discourse of sŏnjin’guk, the taken-for-granted assumptions and visions of the discourse reflect their own particularistic, rather than universal, perceptions of the self and the world. In relation to this, they need to have more diverse and critical views on the distinction between sŏnjin’guk and hujin’guk. By different criteria, such as the crime rate or the sense of social solidarity, the South Korean society can be far more advanced than other societies that they refer to sŏnjin’guk. In a similar vein, many low-income countries can be regarded as sŏnjin’guk insofar as they have successfully established a peace-loving, happiness-centered model of development, reflecting its own historical, cultural backgrounds.

In regard to a new concept of development, economic growth is basically one of the conditions for national development. The importance of economic growth varies
according to societies’ material needs. If other important social, cultural values have to be sacrificed under the cause of economic growth, it is hardly a situation of development in a comprehensive sense. In this way, economic growth is not a sufficient condition for national development, not to mention that for sŏnjin’guk. In terms of modernity, South Korea has achieved a distinctive modernity distinguished from the modernities of Western societies, in which various traditional, Asian, and Western elements are intermingled. In this respect, they need to have confidence in their modernity, going beyond the self-orientalistic attitudes reflected in the discourse of sŏnjin’guk. The concept of modernities pays attention to the individuality of each society’s modernity as a result of its own historical experiences. In this respect, it is reluctant to make a hierarchy between modernities, not to mention to regard modernity as singular. In this sense, large part of hierarchy constructed between hujin’guk and sŏnjin’guk in the current discourse is logically and empirically ungrounded. In relation to this, Nederveen Pieterse (2001:157) notes that “the line between ‘developing’ and ‘developed’ worlds has been blurring.”

An important contribution of post-developmentalism in development studies is that it has provided ways to de-naturalize the concept of development and to recognize it as a discursive construction charged with Western political economic interests. From “non-developmental” perspectives, it has presented discursive frameworks to criticize “development” as a reflection of Western ways of looking at the world. In this way, it has played an important role in deconstructing the Eurocentric notion of development, which is obsessed with economic growth. A limitation of post-development
perspectives, however, is that they end up with an anti-development attitude by reducing it mainly to a Eurocentric discursive construction (Nederveen Pieterse 2009:ch. 7). Thus, they are hard to be accepted as a practical option to industrial societies. Their usefulness mainly lies in recognizing the discursive nature of development and deconstructing the Eurocentric notions of development. Rather than the anti-development position, I would argue for diversified and historically, culturally situated views on development. In this respect, the value of economic development should not be either disregarded or exaggerated. A preferable development process is to enhance various social, cultural, political, and economic values together, rather than to sacrifice others by prioritizing one of them.

As for South Korea’s future development, I would suggest that South Koreans move beyond the conventional modern (or modernization) paradigm. As is argued by the current sŏnjinha project, it is the time to go towards a mature country, following the achievement of industrialization and democratization. However, a crucial problem of the current sŏnjinha project, mainly promoted by the government and ruling elites, is that its episteme is confined within the Eurocentric neoliberal modern paradigm. In fact, various neoliberal policies, such as financial liberalization and the privatization of public institutions, are promoted under the name of sŏnjinha. Considering the limitations of neoliberalism as a development strategy, I highly suspect if the current sŏnjinha project would lead the country to the “advanced” level.

I think that desirable sŏnjinha should make efforts to go beyond the Eurocentric neoliberal notions of development. In relation to this, the new notion of
sŏnjinhwa should, paradoxically, be constructed upon the deconstruction of the conventional distinction between hujin'guk and sŏnjin'guk. This needs a perception that development is non-linear multiple processes, rather than a certain achieved condition. In this respect, Nederveen Pieterse (2001:159) points out that development is a “collective learning experience” and that “[l]earning is open-ended.” This conception of development involves resistance to any privileged one-dimensional perspective. At the same time, it means plural, open, and multi-dimensional approaches to development.

For the past decade, South Korean society has been severely impacted by neoliberalism. Under the neoliberal transformation in various fields, which has been promoted by the government as the only way to survive in global competition, socio-economic conditions for the working population have deteriorated in many aspects (Jang 2006). The causes of winning global competition and of eventually becoming sŏnjin'guk have played a major role in oppressing resistances to the neoliberal transformation. Meanwhile, as this study has shown, the publicly perceived condition of GDP per capita for sŏnjin'guk has increased from $20,000 to $30,000, both of which are far higher than internationally used criteria for high-income country.

It is hard to say at this point where South Korea is heading towards now. Is it continuing the “miracle of the Han river”? It seems to me that South Koreans are now somewhat confusing about the direction of their country after the “miracle.” Lacking the ability to see beyond the conventional modern paradigm, they are still stuck in the Eurocentric notion of GDP-centered development. They are still trapped in the modern game when they need to create a far more sustainable and comprehensive model of
development. Given the nature of capital and the competitive global order, the Korean construction of new model should go in tandem with the global trend. In this respect, South Korea should not consider itself as in a passive position vis-à-vis the global trend. Rather, it is a time for Koreans to consider a way to contribute to the desirable change of the world. I believe that with abundant peaceful and communitarian cultural heritages, Koreans have much potential to construct a new developmental model, which is far more comprehensive and communitarian than the Eurocentric one and eventually contributive to a better world.

A main limitation of this research is related to its attempt to cover quite a long historical period. As a pioneering work on the historical interactions between Korean and global Eurocentric discourses, this study has ambitiously tried to look over the long historical times. Thus, while providing a historical overview of discourses, it has not paid sufficient attention to detailed aspects of the historical flow. Besides, this research has mainly relied upon the analysis of some representative newspapers. In these respects, my future research will focus on elaborating details of the historical flow, based upon the analyses of a broader range of research materials.
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