

Recognition of Silhak as Thought of Social
Reform and Participatory Governance of
Urban and Regional Development in Modern
Korea

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I. Introduction

Koreans have constantly suffered from foreign invasions and ensuing foreign cultural impact since the 17th century. A series of events since then, such as the development of the school of Silhak (Practical Learning, 實學), the movement of against Western Learning (Seohak), and the movement of enlightenment and reform, can be interpreted as Koreans' attempts to maintain their identity amid such impacts and confusions. Since the liberation from the Japanese colonial rule in 1945, Koreans have explored a political and social order capable of building a new, independent nation-state and intellectual tradition and identity.

Silhak as a movement that had indigenous roots in 17th century Korea, was greatly broadened and strengthened by outside influences, and finally became the dominant intellectual current of the times by the second half of the 18th century (Cheon, 1966). Criticizing Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism, the school of Silhak advocated "pragmatic statecraft (經世治用)," "improvement of lives through practical utilization(利用厚生)" and "seeking truth from facts (實事求是)."

Koreans seem to reflect their own ideological roots of Silhak, which constituted a great branch of modern Korean thought. The underlying thought of Silhak is still dominating every aspect of Korean thought and the main stream of Korean social thought in Korea's intellectual history (Pak, 1981; Chun, 1982; Choi, 1978).

Even though the originators of Silhak School could not envisage a modern society as it is now today, they certainly strove to bring in a modern society, seeing indications of the disintegration of the feudalistic society. This is evidenced by the fact that they seriously discussed ways of bringing in pragmatism in actual life and social organization. The situation today is quite different from that of the time that gave rise to the Silhak movement, but there still remain numerous pre-modern elements in our society. That is why the study of Silhak is significant for us today.

Silhak emerged in Korea as a school of social criticism or a learning of social practice. Participatory governance in the field of urban and regional development is one of important planning issues in Korea as well as many developing countries. The interconnections between planning and governance are also receiving increased attention. With respect to a learning of social practice, the main questions addressed in this paper are:

First, can the intellectual movement of Silhak deal with issues of participatory governance?

Second, what are its planning and social implications?

The purpose of this paper is to examine whether and how much the Silhak school contributes toward achieving participatory governance.

II. Governance of Urban and Regional Development in Modern Korea

1. Urban and Regional Governance

The concept of governance is complex and controversial. There are some common points of departure, however. First, governance is not just about the formal structures of government. Governance as a concept recognizes that power exists inside and outside the formal authority and institutions of government. Many definitions of governance include three principle groups of actors: government, the private sector, and civil society. Second, governance emphasizes 'process'. It recognizes that decisions are made based on complex relationships between many actors with different priorities (Devas, 2004). It is the reconciliation of these competing priorities that is at the heart of the concept of governance. UN-HABITAT (2001) is proposing the following definition of governance:

Urban governance is the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, plan and manage the common affairs of the city. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and cooperative action can be taken. It includes formal institutions as well as informal arrangements and the social capital of citizens.

The term governance has been widely adopted in the discourse of international development in recent year, but with varying connotations. It is often associated with normative values, as in the term 'good governance' which features so heavily in the discourse of donor agencies (Leftwich, 2000; World Bank, 1997). UN-Habitat (2001), in its Global Campaign for Urban Governance, identifies a number of norms and principles:

- participation;
- decentralization;
- equity;
- inclusion;
- accountability;

- responsiveness to civil society;
- efficiency of service delivery;
- sustainability;
- security.

An understanding of urban and regional governance stems from a definition of governance itself. McCarney, Halfani and Rodriguez (1995) describe governance as “the relationship between civil society and the state, rulers and the ruled, the government and the governed” (McCarney et al. 1995).

In this study we use the term ‘governance’ in a neutral sense to refer range of relationships and interactions between the governments and civil society. In terms of urban and regional development projects, I try to focus on the role of civil society, particularly NGOs and CBOs, as participatory governance in the development process.

2. Civil Movements in Rural and Urban Development: Two Cases

Let me first take a closer look at civil movements for the rural and urban development process. As a rural development movement, I will take ‘Saemaul Undong.’ which was one of the most influential rural development projects in modern history of Korea. And I also take the Joint Redevelopment Project (JRP) as one of urban redevelopment projects in terms of housing movements for the poor after civilian governments took the power.

(1) The Saemaul Undong

In 1970, the Saemaul Undong (a new community movement) was started under the leadership of the late President Park Chung-hee with its identifying slogan of 'let's improve our livelihood'. The term "Saemaul" was coined by combining Sae, which means 'progressive renewal based on past experiences,' and Maul, which refers to 'village or community.' Thus Saemaul Undong represents a continuous effort towards community renewal and modernization for a better future.

Saemaul Undong emphasized growth by manifesting and enacting the people's desire to be free from the shackles of poverty and to join the ranks of well-to-do societies. The program was sponsored by the central government and characterized by three basic principles: 'diligence', 'self-help', and 'cooperation.' And it was meant to be the cornerstone in the modernization of Korea, reforming and revitalizing the spiritual as well as the material orientation of the nation and of its people.

The Saemaul movement was started in the rural sector, and then moved to the town, and the metropolitan cities. In rural areas, the Saemaul movement helped the farmers to recognize that the modernization of agriculture demanded cooperation between farmers; and indeed, the agricultural sector has made fast growth since the Saemaul Undong began. But perhaps more important has been its impact on the morale of the people. The movement has had far-reaching positive effects throughout Korean countryside. Whether willingly and harmoniously or not, farmers have worked together to improve local roads, bridges, and the facilities of dwellings (Ban, Moon and Perkins, 1980, p.277).

One of the most remarkable changes villagers achieved through Saemaul Undong can be seen in the more progressive and scientific attitudes among Koreans. Only 48.9% of those surveyed in 1970 answered that people around them as well as themselves willingly accepted new ways of thinking, new technology and methods. The corresponding figure rose to 80.5% in 1975. In

1971, the first year of Saemaul Undong, the average urban family earned 452,000 Korean won while its rural counterpart earned 356,000 Korean won. Within three years this changed in favor of rural households: in 1974, average rural household income was 674,000 Korean won whereas the corresponding figure for the urban household stood at 644,000 Korean won. Saemaul Undong's success bears global significance as well. A well-regarded theory argues that it is common for the rural sector of a nation that has gained independence and is regaining national identity, to become dependent on the urban sector in the process of development (National Council of Saemaul Undong, 2005).

Koreans increasingly realized the potential gains from the collective efforts of citizens. Accordingly, a collective confidence-building effort, characterized as a "Can-Do" spirit, was promoted across the country. Saemaul Undong projects focused on achieving quantitative or concrete results, and placed greater emphasis on the results rather than on the process or quality of the implementation. Moreover, the project scope was often rather narrow, which resulted in a failure to tailor projects to the specific needs and characteristics of different implementation units. While Saemaul Undong was actively gaining ground in the rural sector based on the sector's homogeneity, it failed to leave much impact in regions outside the rural communities. The urban Saemaul Undong has been tried to change the urban citizen's way of thinking, especially encouraging self-support and voluntary participation in the movement, and has not concentrated on slum and squatter upgrading (Ministry of Home Affairs, 1981).

If social structure can be divided into state, institutional politics, and civil society, it may be said that an authoritarian regime is a regime whereby institutional politics and civil society are oppressed and controlled by the authoritarian state. Under the Park military authoritarian regime the arena of institutional politics and civil society shrank to an extreme extent. It is important here to note that government-controlled social movements could exist during the Park regime

and the early phase of the Chun Doo-whan regime. During the peak of an authoritarian regime, the status of NGOs, though illegal, is further reinforced. Only government-patronized organizations like the Korean Federation of Trade Unions and the Saemaul Undong Headquarters in civil society enjoyed free existence. Placed under the control of so-called “state corporatism,” they received economic benefits and exclusive privileges in return for their political support of an authoritarian regime.

(2) Joint Redevelopment Projects in Urban Areas

Various urban renewal approaches have been taken since the early 1960s to alleviate the substandard housing problems. However, none have been adequate, and the situation is worse than even before. In 1983, a new urban redevelopment project (JRP) was introduced by the government, which was supposed to take on the spirit of a homeowner (landowner)-construction company partnership. The project is initiated on voluntary basis with the committee of homeowners and construction company officials selected by representatives of homeowners’ cooperate, to build high-rise flats and shared profits. In order to work on the site for redevelopment, a redevelopment association is created to work with homeowners to get the required two-thirds vote for approval.

With the JRPs, 153,996 old and poor houses were removed and replaced by 323,534 new houses. From this figure it can easily be concluded that housing redevelopment projects have contributed to a housing stock increase (Table 1).

<Table 1> Housing Redevelopment Projects (as of Dec. 2004)

Number of districts	Area (1000 m ²)	Demolition (Number of buildings)	New construction (units)

430	18,647	153.996	323,534

Source: Ministry of Construction and Transportation, 2005

In urban Korea, particularly in Seoul, the JRP has systematically demolished substandard housing in areas where the urban poor are concentrated, thereby isolating and marginalizing the displaced tenants. Urban redevelopment project is basically profit-oriented and regards housing as a commodity in the open market.

Millions of poor people, called squatters in most quarters, have been evicted during the past two decades in Seoul, often violently. The governments usually justify evictions in two ways: 'beautify' or 'improve' the city, and 'redevelopment'. If settlements are judged to be illegal - even if they have been there many years - this is a convenient excuse to bulldoze them with no compensation paid to former tenants. Landowners or developers can make very large profits from redevelopment projects. The most fundamental problem with redevelopment project for slums is that it completely isolates and marginalizes the tenants.¹ Some renting families have not left the areas to seek for better bargaining power to move out. Those who cannot move find that rents in nearby areas have already risen 2 or 3 times as demolition approaches. It becomes impossible for them to go anywhere and they decide to resist the demolition.

In order to forcibly evict resisting tenants, the homeowners association and the construction company hire an eviction agency. The hire gangsters or thugs move into the districts and create an atmosphere of violence and fear by their abusive language, and their

¹ Renters are usually 50-60 percent of the population in redevelopment areas in Seoul.

threatening gestures (Ha, 2001, pp.357-397). Korea was listed along with South Africa, as one of the two countries in the world where evictions by force are most brutal and inhuman (Asian Coalition of Housing Rights, 1989, p.1).

Housing movements in Korea can be categorized as resident's movements and intellectual movements. Residents' movements in Seoul were spontaneous ones pursued by abruptly mobilized residents groups. The well-known cases of residents' movements in Seoul were the squatters' association of Sanggedong and Mokdong redevelopment areas. In contrast to residents' movements, the intellectual movements are represented by the religious organizations and the NGOs, particularly, the Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice (CCEJ).²

What the CCEJ has done in terms of the low-income housing is as follows: campaign for secure housing for tenants, campaign for secure housing for 15,000 households living in the 'vinyl huts'³ demanding that the government stops evicting people from their dwelling places without offering them proper compensation, and proposed alternative policies. The CCEJ urban poor council and housing committee held public forums and various types of actions, such as a rally in front of the national government office to demand secure housing for the urban poor (Ha, 2002).

In July 1987 the Federation of Evicted People of Seoul (FEPS), in short Socholhyop, was organized by groups of people who have had an experience of eviction in redevelopment project areas. The objectives of the FEPS are to assist each other in eviction

² With respect to the anti-evictions and low-income housing, there are several CBOs and NGOs in Korea: ①The Federation of Evicted People of Seoul(FEPS), ②The Federation of National Street Vendors(FNSV), ③The Korean Coalition for Housing Rights(KCHR), ④The Korea Center for City and Environment Research(KOCER), ⑤The Catholic Organization of the Urban Poor, ⑥The Pastoral Committee for the Urban Poor, ⑦The Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice(CCEJ), and ⑧The Korea National Association of the Urban Poor.

³ The typical vinyl huts were constructed by thin wood board layers inside and vinyl cover outside.

cases and to solve other common problems and lobby government to promulgate policies that would solve the problems of the urban poor. The Korean Coalition for Housing rights (KCHR) established in line with low-income housing movements. The anti eviction movements by NGOs, CBOs, and renters have been obtained some degree of result.

In view of the wide scale violations of housing rights by forced evictions in Korea, it was unanimously proposed that the South Korea be targeted for the first project of Asian Coalition for Housing Rights' (ACHR) regional action plan. An ACHR team visited Seoul on the eve of the 1988 Olympics. ACHR is the regional organization of Habitat International Coalition, which is recognized by the United Nations as the leading non-government world housing body. ACHR team's report was critical of the government's housing policies. A Fact Finding Mission is an information gathering as well as a social process requiring the participation and cooperation of many individuals and organizations. The ACHR team included housing experts, parliamentarians and officials from several countries. The team suggested that people should not be evicted until permanent alternative housing is prepared, and at least temporary housing should be provided. And it would be helpful if ordinary people could participate more fully in the planning and implementation of programs that affect them (ACHR, 1990, pp.42-44).

3. Characteristics of Civil Society Movements

The essence of non-governmental organizations in Western civil societies lies in voluntarism. They have developed a time-honored tradition characterized by voluntary participation as they moved beyond the continued confrontation among governments, markets,

and the citizens during the Citizens' Revolution. On the other hand, in the developing countries, national economy has been weak with little or no capital to support social welfare policies. Accordingly, the NGOs in these countries went along two different paths respectively: either leading anti-government movements, aligning themselves with anti-establishment political movements, or acting to supplement the functions of weak public welfare systems by developing close relations with the government based on mutual interests. With respect to the experiences and achievements of Saemaul Undong, the movement has contributed to supplement the functions of weak public welfare systems and government tasks.

Toward the end of the 1980s, sweeping changes were made in Korea, and democracy was enhanced as a result. This brought about an explosive growth of non-governmental and non-profit civil movements, which, in turn, dictated the need for Saemaul Undong to improve its mechanism and structures. Because Saemaul Undong was initiated by the government in an era when the nation's economic growth was led by the government, some still regard it as a quasi-governmental organized movement. Such misunderstandings must be clarified, through the creation of an autonomous, independent organization. As a civil movement, Saemaul Undong has not focused on criticism, monitoring, and the filing of formal complaints with government authorities, which typical civil movements in Korea have tended during the 1960s and 1970s.

Most existing studies of civil society or NGOs in Korea came out after the democratic movement of 1987 and define civil society in Korea in Western terms. They argue that various interest groups and voluntary associations played the role of the arbiter between individuals and the state, and between private and public sectors. The backdrop for the advent of a new political culture was the emergence of professionals and the middle class as a result of a

developing economy, which fostered a fledgling pluralistic social structure (Han, 1977, pp. 38-97; Chung, 1977, pp. 81-97; Chang, 1998, pp. 277-296).

Since the founding of the Republic of Korea in 1948, South Korea has been developed in the rapid political turmoil process. The first Republic of Korea led by Lee Sungman regime was collapsed by the student movement in 1961. After that the Jang Myun regime also was toppled by the Military Coup d'etat in 1961. The Park's military authoritarian regime had been sustained for 18 years. Unfortunately the President Park was killed by one of his top aides, Director of Korea Intelligence Agency, on October 26, 1979. In 1980, the fifth Republic was established by a new military authoritarian government, which was led by a military general, Chun.

The new military regime was faced a serious political crisis in line with so called "June Uprising (1987)", which was a national movement and rally against to military regime for seeking the restoration of democracy. The Chun's regime succumbed to citizens' instances on constitutional amendment for direct election for the president. It is an important transition stage to pursue democratic way of politics in South Korea from the military authoritarian government to the civil government.

In the late 1980s, political reforms and changes in Korea have brought much the same situation with collapse of military regimes in many developing countries in Asia and Africa. And the 1980s was a big transformation period for democratic way of political system and social development from a historical point of view. In order to make a more democratic rule of law and administrative system, Korea has had several amendments of laws and radical policy changes. These kinds of social and political reform policies could provide a basis for making a new civic government in 1993. The political democratization of South Korea was touched off by the bottom up civil society movements. And the process of political elites' conflict,

cooperation and compromise also affected toward achieving positive political reform in South Korea.

With respect to the NGOs and CBOs activities for the low-income group, particularly urban renewal projects, civil movements emerged after the democratic movement of 1987. NGOs have emerged as critical intermediary institutions supporting citizen's organizations to obtain access to resources and to negotiate with governments and other state institutions. In some cases, they may also negotiate on behalf of the citizens with the private sector. Some NGOs after 1987 have developed innovative ways to support disadvantaged group. NGOs and citizen groups have also pioneered the development of participatory tools and methods that permit a much more active involvement of citizens and their association in identifying their needs and priorities (Ha, 2004).

III. The Implication of Governance from the School of Silhak

From the above mentioned case studies, there are some key points we can put together. First, it is difficult to say that during the 1960s and 1970s Korea achieved the participatory governance in the community development process, particularly the case of Saemaul Undong. The community movement was not citizen's voluntary campaign and movement. It was a government-initiated movement and a government-dependent campaign.

Second, the active civil society movement, particularly NGOs activities, in the field of urban and regional development, came out after the democratic movement of 1987 with the so-called "June Uprising," and they define Korean civil society in Western terms.

From a historical point of view, does Korea have any movement of participatory governance on Confucian soil? Koreans seem to reflect their own ideological roots of Silhak, which constituted a great branch of modern Korean thought. Judging from this point of view, does the Silhak school provide a viable means for strengthening participatory governance?

1. Recognition of Silhak as Thought of Social Reform

In 1392, General Yi Seong-gye established a new dynasty called Joseon (1392-1910). The early rulers of Joseon, in order to counter the dominant Buddhist influence during the Goryeo period, supported Confucianism as the guiding philosophy of the kingdom. Medieval Korea was riddled with serious external and internal problems, such as invasions by the Japanese marauders in late Goryeo, the government dangerously weakened, isolationism, and rigid intellectual orthodoxy. In tackling these problems, the newly rising scholar-officials (*sinheung sadaebu*) embraced Neo-Confucianism as an ideology of reform that confronted Buddhism.

Neo-Confucianism served as the dominant ideology throughout the Joseon dynasty. However, Neo-Confucianism's role and relative importance were not the same throughout the 500-year history of the dynasty. Neo-Confucianism also played a prominent role in the development of Korean society until the latter half of the seventeenth century. However, when Korean society began to change from an agriculture-oriented society into a commerce- and industry-oriented one thereafter, Neo-Confucianism failed to successfully cope with the resultant social changes, resulting in deepened socioeconomic contradictions. There arose a new school of Silhak in an attempt to resolve these contradictions (Koh, 2003).

In the realm of scholarship, attention shifted from speculative theorizing to matters of practical relevance—the needs of society and state. Scholars who engaged in such studies are identified with the Silhak School. They fell into four major groups. One group

advocated comprehensive administrative reform, calling upon the government to rationalize the systems of civil service examination, education, taxation, and land administration. Another group stressed the need to foster commerce, industry, and technology. A third conducted critical examinations of the Confucian Classics, while the fourth focused on the study of Korean history, geography, and language (Chun, 1982; Lee, 1982).

The Silhak School attacked Neo-Confucianism, particularly its formalism and concern with ritual. Members of the school originated many ideas for social reform, especially for land reform and the development of farming. With the introduction of Western culture in the late 19th century, Silhak, along with Sohak,⁴ or Western Learning, contributed to the development and spread of ideas that stimulated the gradual modernization of Korea. From the early 17th Century, a movement advocating Silhak gained considerable momentum among liberal-minded scholar-officials as a means of building a modern nation.

They strongly recommended programs of progressive, idealistic social reformation, and industrial improvement. The conservative government aristocrats, however, were not ready to accommodate such a drastic change. In the latter half of the Joseon era, government administration and the upper classes came to be marked by recurring factionalism. To rectify the undesirable political situation, King Yeongjo (1724-1776) eventually adopted a policy of impartiality. And In 1776, Chongjo (1752-1800), known the sage-king, established the Kyujanggak, a royal academy, at the palace.

The development of Silhak is divided into three periods: the preparation period (1550-1650): the development period (1650-1750), and the flourishing period (1750-

⁴ Sohak: "Western Learning" in Korean history, the study of Western culture, introduced into Korea from the Chinese Ming and Ch'ing dynasties in the 17th and 18th centuries. In a broad sense, the term Sohak refers to the study of Western thought, religion, ethics, science, and technology.

1850) (Chon, 1964; Kalton, 1975). Many scholars describe Silhak as a broad intellectuals movement rising from a combination of indigenous Korean factors and influences from abroad. Within this movement are numbers of schools, such as the advocates of “Northern (Ching) Learning,” which are based on ties of blood, friendship, or direct intellectual influences, but these schools can by no means include all who participate in Silhak (Kalton, 1975; Lee, 1982). At the end of the flourishing period Silhak was finally replaced as main intellectual current by the modern thought of the “enlightenment” movement (Setton, 1997).

2. On Silhak Thinkers’ Reform Thought

Cheon (1966) has made an attempt to define three characteristics of the Silhak spirit. The first is the spirit of criticism, which many reform-minded thinkers criticized the ruling bureaucrats and the policies, including the various aspects of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy. Secondly, the spirit of verification is symbolized by the expression “the pursuit of truth based on actual fact.” A third characteristic of Silhak is the spirit of practicality. This constituted a reaction to the idealism of Joseon Neo-Confucian learning, which treated administrative concerns as “the province of petty officials” and productive technique as “artfulness.”

Even though the originators of silhak school could not envisage a modern society as it is now today, they certainly strove to bring in a modern society, seeing indications of the disintegration of the feudalistic society. This is evidenced by the fact that they seriously discussed ways of bringing in pragmatism in actual life and social organization. The situation today is quite different from that of the time that gave rise to the silhak movement, but there still remain numerous premodern elements in our society. That is why the study of Silhak is

significant for us today. In order to investigate how much the Silhak school contributes toward achieving participatory governance, it is essential to review works by Silhak thinkers.

(1) Yi I (pan name: Yulgok, 1536-1584)

Yi Yulgok, one of the foremost Neo-Confucian scholars in Korea during the Yi dynasty, is considered as the fountainhead of Silhak.⁵ Yi dynasty Silhak thought developed from Yulgok's metaphysics, which emphasized the dependence of Li (principle) upon Ki (material force)(Kalton, 1975). As mirrored in his life, Yulgok's thought was divided into two directions: first the study of 'human nature and principle'; and second the practical considerations of good government (Ro, 1989).

According to Ro (1989), Yulgok's own thought came to be known as "Silsagusi (實事求是)" which translates as "seeking truth in actual affairs," and which contains the connotations of truth, fact, completion, or fulfillment; whereas a lack of reality, for him, implied deception, emptiness, incompleteness, or unfulfillment.

Yulgok's pragmatism led him to develop a large body of thought on questions of government and economics. Yulgok's critique of ineffective government, government that failed to provide for its people, focused on what he called a failure or lack of reality. When the government is not effective it is because of a lack of effective reality, particularly "a lack of reality in the relationship between the government and the people."

Yulgok's critique of successful government also pivoted on this same idea of reality, pinpointing nine areas in which reality must be achieved – that is, where theory must be realized in practice. These nine areas are ①reality in the investigation of things and the

⁵ According to the Kim Kyung-tak, Yulgok is the fountainhead of Silhak for two reasons; 1)his many proposals for military, administrative, and social reform; 2) his metaphysics of "Li mounted on Ki."

extension of knowledge; ② reality in sincerity of the will; ③ reality in self-cultivation; ④ reality in filial piety; ⑤ reality in governance of the home and family; ⑥ reality in employing the worthy; (at court); ⑦ reality in eliminating the wicked (from court); ⑧ reality in protecting the people; ⑨ and reality in reform through teaching. We see here Yulgok's organic view of the cohesiveness of government and society (Yulgok Chönsö, 1971).⁶

He was also very interested in the ethical implication of economic activity. In Yulgok's view work is sacred, and the desire to accumulate wealth is natural and beneficial human instinct.

Government, he believed, has no right to prevent the individual from reaping economic profit or accumulating wealth. However, he did see limits, and these limits, having to do with the manner in which the individual profited, actually stemmed from the sacred, Heaven-sanctioned nature of work itself. This was the root of Yulgok's famous theory of "seeing economic profit but thinking of righteousness (見利思義) (Ro, 1989).

(2) Yu, Hyoung-won (pen name: Pan-Kye, 1622-1673)

As a leader of the Silhak school, Yu Hyoung-won drew up a proposal for the systematic reform of all fields of politics and economics. According to his work, Pan-Kye-Su-Rok-Pal-Mun (磻溪隨錄跋文), he strongly advocated the reform of the obsolete system in order to build a welfare state. Particularly, his opposition to the traditional stand of the confucianists, whose solution to social problems was via moral perfection expressed in such homilies as Su-Shin-Che-Ka(修身齊家), or "regulate oneself, put one's house in order" and Chi-Shim-Yang-Song(治心養性) or "discipline the mind, foster one's nature," brought

⁶ Yulgok Chönsö (栗谷全書), (1971), Vol. 1, p.98.

philosophy a step closer to the solution of social problems through political and economic reforms.

He advocated that the citizens were the basis of government. That is, the object of government was not to benefit the rulers or a small number of elite, but its purpose was to benefit the whole people. The purpose of government, moreover, was certainly not to benefit a tiny minority while vexing the people with useless and evil laws. This was his ideology of Min-Bon(民本) or “people as the base” government.

As regarded his thought on the equality of human rights, he did not fundamentally oppose the feudal caste system but he did advocate the abolition of the iniquitous restrictions on individual status imposed by the educational and civil service examination systems. He claimed that brains and character should be the standards and, in picking out men of talent, the civil service examination should be abolished and adopting “Kong-Ko (貢舉)” or “system of selecting local talents.” Moreover, even about 350 years ago under the feudalism, he advocated that if women were to devote themselves to government service, they should be treated the same as men. This would bring about a situation of equality where there was no innate “high and low”

(3) Yi Ik (pen name: Sŏngho, 1681-1763)

In the field of axiology, Sŏngho stressed that the people are the foundation stones of the nation through his “people as the base concept (民本思想).” A simile that he used was that the people are like the roots and the nation is like the flower. No matter how beautiful the flower is, it wants to continue living a healthy life, the roots, above all, must be sound. Even if it is the most beautiful flower in the world, if the roots wither then, naturally, it will die. In exactly the same way, fine person is essential as the foundation of a fine country. Even in the

case of exceptionally rich and powerful countries, if there is no vitality in the lives of their people, they will eventually end up destroying themselves just like withering flowers with no roots.

He considered serfdom worse than burglary. There were two kinds of serfs: government serfs and private serfs. Serfs employed by the government and those owned by prominent and influential yangban families were exempted from military duty. Seongho proposed that the king treat serfs of both categories equally as ordinary citizens and mobilize all for military duty. He claimed that men were born equal, with no distinction between poor and rich, humble and noble (Song, 1972).

He opposed the monopoly of land ownership (土地兼併) of the yangban and officials and advocated that land should be shared equally among the farmers. Yi Ik, a great pillar of the Silhak, believed that all land should be public. He was concerned with the fact that influential Yangban families possessed too much land, while impoverished farming families were lacking even a minimal patch of land. As means of reforming what he thought to be the evil practice of possessing private land, he proposed preventing the poor from selling their land. By doing so, he hoped to help the poor retain their land and prevent it from being annexed by the rich, who did not till it (Song, 2004, p.330).

He viewed that a nation can become rich and powerful only when it makes sure that its people are well fed and have a keen enthusiasm for life. According to his concept of “love for the people(愛民思想),” he pointed out that the food, clothing, and shelter that the people of a country need to live do not simply drop from the sky, nor do they spring up from the earth, but are made by man’s hands. The ruler, therefore, has the duty to look after people who perform these important functions.

In the latter part of the Yi dynasty the Silhak thinkers turned away from the Dohak schools (orthodox Neo-Confucianism) metaphysics and actively displayed diverse interest in Western science. They sought facts grounded on concrete evidence. Yi Ik himself was fascinated by Western science and agreed with Adam Schall's reformed Calendar and calculations of solar and lunar eclipses. And there were those who showed a positive attitude towards Western learning and the Catholic faith (Keum, 1986). Yi Ik inherited Yi Su-gwang's erudition and open-mindedness to Western culture and Yu Hyoung-won critical reform society.

Yi Ik thought that an accurate measure of the population was a prerequisite for military administration and policies. He asserted that county magistrates should be held responsible for measuring the population of their counties. Secret royal inspectors, he claimed, should be assigned to the mission of determining if there had been any omissions in census taking.

(4) Pak, Chi-won (pen name: Yon-am, 1737-1805)

In 1780, he got to join the party of the Chinese envoy returning to China. This marked an important turning point in the development of his thought. He wrote books on a wide variety of subjects, such as astronomy, history, economics, geography, etc. His Silhak thought is well reflected in the 26 volumes of his Jehol Diary(熱河日記), which is an account of what he learned on his Chinese travels.

Yon-am's theory of knowledge derives from the light we see with our eyes, the sounds we hear with our ears and the tastes we savor with our mouths – the actual image of the outside world as perceived through our senses. The objective existence of the outside world then seems to be the ultimate truth. With this groundwork, he firmed the basis of progressive Silhak thought (Choi, 1978).

He starts from the proposition that only after one's life has been made comfortable, one can correctly grasp human morality, and only after “利用 or utilization” has been practiced, “厚生 or welfare” can come about. This was basically different from the stand of the Confucianists who had taught that the way to achieve social reform was by way of “修身齊家 or Regulate Oneself,” “治心養性 or Govern the Mind, Foster One's Nature.”

His theory of value based on “Seeking the Truth in Concrete Reality” and Practical Welfare” to build a country that would be good to live in. Yon-am emphasized the abolition of the feudal caste system and the introduction of science and technology from advanced countries as well as trade with foreign nations. And with respect to his value, “許生傳 or Tale of Ho Saeong” was one instance of his depiction of the ideal society through literature. He stressed and embraced “寫實主義 or Realism, and rejected “形式主義 or Formalism.”

(5) Chong, Yak-yong (Pen name: Tasan, 1762-1836)

Chong Yak-yong was a great Silhak thinker and established unique systems in almost all branches of learning including politics, economics, social affairs, as well as presented methods of social reform.⁷

Dasan made it clear that sovereignty rests not with the king or ruler, but with the people. He declared, “Heaven never questions whether you are a bureaucrat or a commoner,” and proclaimed the innate equality of all people. In other words, the basic tone of his political philosophy was found in his rejection of autocracy and support of democracy (Han, 2004, p.367; Keum, 2004). Dasan asserted that laws should have been enacted according to the will of the people, and so should be profitable to the people. He exposed the irrationality of the

⁷ Dasan left a large amount of work totaling some 500 volumes covering various branches of learning from commentaries of the Confucian classics to practical subjects.

feudal autocratic politics in which laws were enacted according to the arbitrary aims and interests of the ruler, in complete disregard of popular wants or interests (Han, 2004, p.367; Keum, 2002, p.252).

The vertical order of yangban (nobility), sangmin (commoners) and Chonmin (humble) in the social hierarchy was one of the social mainstays of Korea in the Middle Age along with the landlord-serf system. Shilhak scholars were quite critical, in particular social order.

Government posts were monopolized by yangban and they enjoyed this privilege along with exemption from military service. In earlier writing (通塞議) he emphasized that the best policy is to eliminate all regional barriers and hierarchical discrimination (Keum, 2002, p.254). The selection of government officials according to ability can lead to prolongation of the social hierarchy if one thinks that men of ability can be produced only from specific orders in the social hierarchy. He asserted that “how is it that heaven distributes excellent spirits and vitality only to families of distinguished names?” Tasan’s proposition for the selection of government officials by grade of ability functions rather as a criticism of the social hierarchy. Tasan does not see human capability as inherent. He also stresses equal opportunity for education. His criticism of yangban was not merely directed at social inequality but at the social maladies of stagnant productivity and deficits in state finance (Cho, 1986).

In light of the step-by-step nature of social reform thought, he reached his proposition of “down with yangban,” in his late years, to be decrease of the noblesse privilege of yangban as expounded in Kyongse Yup’yo (經世遺表, Treatise on Government, 1818). Tasan’s reform thought was aiming at the disintegration of the order and at a modern system of

status stratification. Underlying this reform, there was a philosophical foundation predicated on the equalitarian view of man (Keum, 2002).

In *Kyongse Yup'yo Tasan* presents his view of reform on politics and land reform. He proposed the creation of public farms by purchase, the collection of farm tax (land tax) by tilling the public farms, distribution of land according to the ability of tillers, gradual phasing out of the landlord-serf system, and transfer of tenant farmers into self-employed farmers. However, in one of his representative earlier writings, “Chöllon (田論, A Treatise on Land), he advocated nationalization of land, joint tilling of the land and distribution of products according to labor output. Such reform can be seen as a total negation of the medieval landlord-serf system (Cho, 1986).

There were many serious land problems including the expanding landlord system, and a rapid land accumulation by privileged yangban landlords and degradation of peasants into poor tenants. Tasan's land reform thought formed one of the pivotal elements in his social reform thought. When he was still young, Tasan made public his radical land reform ideas. When he reached academic maturity later, however, he conceived and presented his new land reform thought on the basis of the chŏngjŏn system(井田制) According to the chŏngjŏn system, there were two principles of land distribution method. The first principle called for land distribution only among those who were engaged in farming.⁸ Second was the principle on the basis of “family labor force.” This has been interpreted as being based on traditional “family” or as the principle of distributing land “according to ability” (Shin, 1985).

Discussing the chongjŏn system in *Kyongse Yup'yo*, he raised a question: “how to govern the land.” He believed that to increase social wealth by elevating agricultural productivity would gradually bring about the welfare of all peasants, achieving economic

⁸ Taking note of this trend, Tasan asserted that artisans and merchants be excluded from land distribution.

equality. On the basis of supporting the chŏngjŏn theory, Tasan criticized the kyunjŏn and hanjŏn theories.⁹ Tasan pointed out that the basic cause of the failure and ineffectiveness were that farms were evenly among the people, including those who were not engaged in farming. As the new measure he first conceived the yŏjŏn system(閭田制)¹⁰ when he was young and then proposed the chŏngjŏn system when he grew mature.

His main concern was ultimately to achieve increased productivity together with economic equality (Shin, 1986).¹¹ And what he tried to reform was redistribution of land on the basis of the family labor force of peasants as a measure to expand agricultural productivity and social wealth. He recognized that the land was being transformed into private ownership and conceived the idea that the government would purchase blocks of public land¹² at its own expense preventing the growing trend of private ownership of land by the landlord class.

One of the greatest merits of the chŏngjŏn theory was that it was very realistic and its enforcement was highly practicable. But his theory failed to present a countermeasure for landlordism (Shin, 1986).

⁹ The kyunjŏn theory(均田論) calls for even distribution of farms in consideration of the acreage of land and the population. The hanjŏn system(限田制) imposes a certain limit on the amount of land one is permitted to buy as well as on the amount of land one is permitted to sell. The hanjŏn theory proposed by Yi Ik and Pak Chi-wŏn.

¹⁰ The characteristic of yŏjŏn system(閭田制) is a kind of common ownership and common cultivation together with common management of villages. A village would be made up of about 30 households who would work the land together. Those who worked hard would be rewarded while those who did little work would receive little in return. This he called Ilyokbu(日役簿) or daily work record.

¹¹ Tasan merely believed that economic equality could be achieved not by the method of “governing the property” but by the method of “governing the land.” His primary aim was to elevate productivity rather than achieving economic equality (Shin, 1986).

¹² One block of public land generally comprises 100 *myo*. The acreage of 10 *myo* of paddy corresponds of four *turak*.

3. Implications from the School of Silhak

(1) In regard to urban and regional development, three roles have been identified for NGOs: enablers, mediators, and advisors (UNCHS, 1996). More than 200 years ago, there were no NGOs existed in the feudalistic society of Yi dynasty. But the role of Silhak scholars is indicated as enablers, mediators and advisors just like today's NGOs. Silhak was a broad intellectuals' movement during the 17th and 18th century in Korea. After the June Uprising (1987), Korea's civil movement was initiated by a group of intellectuals such as professors, lawyers, leaders of religious bodies.

Since the June Uprising, NGOs and citizen groups in Korea have pioneered the development of participatory tools and methods that permit a much more active involvement of citizens and their associations in identifying their needs and priorities and in determining how best to ensure these are met. Most of Silhak scholars advocated abolishing class barriers and slavery in order to build a welfare state through land reform and the development of commerce and technology.

(2) The Silhak School believed that the purpose of government was certainly not to benefit a tiny minority while vexing the people with useless and evil laws. The ideology of Min-Bon(民本) or "people as the base" government was the same as the principle and norms of governance these days. Yulgok asserted that one of crucial points in governance is "a lack of reality in the relationship between the government and the people."

In modern society, if government (including national government as well as local government) constitutes one large piece of the picture, civil society constitutes another. Civil society is often seen as a counterweight to the state, and an active civil society as essential to the achievement of both good governance and development planning. In Korean context of

development planning process, how the citizen, particularly the vulnerable group, can bring their influence to bear, the obvious answer is by organizing so as to make demands through the democratic political system. Since the June Uprising, democratization, or reinvigoration of local democracy, has offered expanded opportunities of this to happen. Yet, as well all know, as the case studies (Saemaul undong and urban renewal project) demonstrate, this is not a simple or straightforward process.

(3) The Silhak scholars demanded respect for civil rights and equality of all people. At the present time, governance refers to political and administrative process of decision-making and how governments react to the needs and demands of residents. Dasan introduced a concept of “election from below” starting from small units such as the villages, passing through the higher units of representatives, finally reaching the king himself. This revolutionary idea defied monarchical despotism. The term ‘good governance’ includes equality of all people in the process of decision-making. Even during the era of feudalism, suggesting the concept of equality of all people was a great democratic ideology and social reform minded campaign.

(4) The Silhak scholars’ land reform movement can be applied even our contemporary urban and regional development planning in Korea. In these civilized days the economic and social benefits from good land management are still enormous; one of the main determinants of the economic success and quality of housing and living conditions in any city is the price and availability of land. Land, because of its unique nature and the crucial role it plays in human settlements, cannot be treated as an ordinary asset. Private landownership is also a principal instrument of accumulation and concentration of wealth and therefore contributes to social injustice in Korea; if unchecked, it may become a major obstacle in the planning and

implementation of development schemes. Social justice, urban and regional development for the people can only be achieved if land is used in the interests of society as a whole.

(5) It is apparent that Tasan's chŏngjŏn theory belongs not to the category of modern land reform thought but to that of feudal land reform thought. Tasan's land reform thought was one of the epochal assertions of the time despite containing several questionable points and remains as a highly useful and important legacy in the history of Korean regional development planning and social thought.

(6) The Silhak scholars adopted a scientific and empirical epistemology and view of the universe, a rational view of ethics, and a positivistic methodology in their academic research (Han, 2004, p.357). They sought facts grounded on concrete evidence. Because of this kind of view an active interest and positive evaluation of Western scientific techniques could be given. The Sŏngho school, with Sŏngho (Yi Ik) as its leader, displayed a greater interest in Western scientific method than other schools at that time.

It is no doubt that one of most important research methods in the field of urban and regional development even in the present day is adoption of a scientific and empirical way of approach. Andres Faludi, one of leading theorists of planning, claimed "Planning is the application of scientific method -----to policy making" (Faludi, 1973; Jay, 1967). The rational process of planning was sometimes likened to Popper's account of the scientific method, with planning goals or polices seen as analogous to scientific hypotheses, which should be subjected to rigorous testing before adoption.¹³

¹³ Planning students were advised to read Karl Popper's pioneering work (Popper, 1957, 1963) on scientific method.

(7) UN-Habitat (2001), in its Global Campaign for Governance, identifies a number of norms and principles: participation; decentralization; equity; inclusion; accountability; responsiveness to civil society; efficiency of service delivery; sustainability.

It is possible to clarify that Silhak scholars adopted a number of norms and principles of governance analogous with UN Global campaign, which we try to pursue at the present time. The Silhak thinkers of Yi dynasty, noted for their deep philosophical reflections, produced many excellent ideas, many of which, if we choose, may still contribute our planning studies and intellectual development.

(8) The Silhak school asserted that a new standard of values be made. The basic idea of the new standard was “equality and human love.” It was the Silhak thinkers’ view that an ideal society could be built through putting into practice such ideas. The concept of “equality and human love” is still valid in modern Korea and the most important value for achieving good participatory governance in the field of urban and regional planning. It is essential to remember that Korea was listed as one of two countries in the world where evictions by force are most brutal and inhuman.

(9) Silhak developed over a span of 200 years, producing shades and grades of difference in nature among scholars, possibly due to differences in social situation as much as due to the progress made in the discipline of the school. From political or social point of view, the need to build a new democratic order of existence to replace the discarded old order stemming from feudalism was strongly asserted. This was the desire of all progressive thinkers of the Silhak

school. I would think that the Silhak thinkers' assertion on "a new democratic order" is a kind of "paradigm shift" in view of contemporary thought.

As used to describe changes in thought, the idea of a "paradigm" derives from the work of Thomas Kuhn (1962), who employed the concept to describe major shifts in theoretical perspective. According to Kuhn, paradigm changes are fundamental shifts in people's view of the world; that is why he describes paradigm shifts as revolutionary.

IV. Conclusions

Silhak presents solutions to difficulties Korean society is faced with, even today. Silhak scholars of the 18th and 19th century prepared the groundwork for political revolution by the Korean people, carried out practical research on industries, and created a new trend of literature appealing to the ordinary people. Such revolution, openness and practicality are still needed today, and we must learn to adopt the ideas and wise vision of that period.

This means that Silhak has found its way into the lives and minds of people, and is not merely an ideology shelved in libraries. Silhak, living and breathing in our daily lives – this is indeed a valuable wisdom that the Silhak scholars have passed on to us. All irrational elements in social life derived from the feudal caste system and overrode human rights, life and property.

The implication of Silhak scholar's way of thinking and their proposal is not limited to the Yi dynasty or Korean intellectual history, but extended to many areas of philosophy, metaphysics,

social policy and even urban and regional planning of the East and the West. In this sense, Silhak is an important school of cross-cultural significance.

Even though the Silhak movement made a great contribution to the social reform and intellectual history, there were some weakness and problems. The Silhak scholars, particularly Dasan's, reform measures were too idealistic and too revolutionary to be accepted by the feudal rulers. There was no political force strong enough to put his thought and ideas into practice.

The task of overcoming the distorted social structure and fixed tradition could not be achieved by a single proclamation or revolution, and certainly not a single day. Economic efficiency and social equality were issues of great concern for Silhak school. It is crucial to remember, however, that the long process of modernization and democratization since the liberation from Japanese rule in 1945 was an extension of early modern Korean thought, beginning with Silhak and then to enlightenment thought.

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