

Guest Editor's Introduction: The Current State of Research on Yu Kilchun and the Search for Methodologies* **

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Research Trends on Yu Kilchun, a Modern Intellectual

Yu Kilchun (1856-1914) was the first Korean to study modern Western civilization in Japan (1881) and the United States (1883). Yu headed to Japan as a member of the Korean Courtiers' Observation Mission (Chosa Shich'aldan) as a result of the momentum from Chosŏn Korea's signing of the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1876 and the subsequent pursuit of modern reforms. Afterwards, he stayed in Japan to further his studies at Keio Gijuku. He returned to Korea after a year and took charge of publishing a newspaper to enlighten the general public on the modernization policies the Chosŏn government was pursuing at the time. He also proposed policies in various areas, such as tax reform and land reform. Afterwards, Yu

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** This paper does not provide detailed research achievements of the Korean academia on Yu Kilchun since it targets readers outside of Korea. For bibliographical information on research and texts on Yu Kilchun, refer to Choi Deoksoo, 2015 "Haebang hu Yu Kilchun yŏn'gu ūi sŏnggwa wa kwaje" (Achievements and challenges of research on Yu Kilchun after Korean liberation from Japanese rule). *Kŭndae Han'guk ūi kaehyŏk kusang kwa Yu Kilchun* (Reform ideas in modern Korea and Yu Kilchun). Koryŏ Taehakkyo Ch'ulp'an Munhwawŏn.

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went to the US as a member of the first delegation Korea sent to the United States after the signing of a treaty between Korea and the U.S. and remained there to study. He returned when political upheaval (the Kapsin Coup of 1884) occurred in Korea, yet due to his political background he was unable to engage in Korean politics. Still, he continued to offer policy suggestions and alternatives for Chosŏn Korea to overcome the internal and external issues it faced.

Yu returned to the world of politics during the period of government-led reforms (1894-1895 Kabo Reforms) triggered by the Tonghak Peasant Rebellion in 1894, and proactively led the reforms serving as the minister of Internal Affairs (Naemu Taesin). However, after King Kojong took refuge at the Russian legation, Yu was exiled to Japan. After ten years of living in exile, he returned to Korea, which was then under the rule of the Japanese Resident-General of Korea, and focused on writing and social movements. Yu Kilchun was an intellectual who understood the historical situation and transformation that Korean society was experiencing at the end of the nineteenth century and pursued reforms. As a bureaucrat, a reformist, and a social activist, he left a huge body of work in various fields that contain his ideology. His writings have been considered the most important materials in studies that help us understand the process of Korea's transformation into a modern society since Korean liberation from the Japanese rule.

Research on Yu Kilchun has been quite active in various fields of Korean studies thanks to the publication of the five volume series *Yu Kilchun chŏnsŏ* (Collected works of Yu Kilchun, Iljogak) in 1971. The first volume contains *Sŏyu kyŏnmun* (Observations on a Journey to the West); the second volume is titled *Munbŏp kyoyuk p'yŏn* (Grammar Education); the third volume, *Yŏksa p'yŏn* (History); the fourth, *Chŏngch'i kyŏngje p'yŏn* (Politics and Economy); the fifth, *Shimun p'yŏn* (Poetry and Prose). Since the publication of *Yu Kilchun chŏnsŏ*, research on Yu Kilchun has expanded. Recently, however, Korean academia's efforts to produce research related to Yu Kilchun and discover new materials have been stymied. The goal to "publish edited volumes upon the discovery of other

materials” on Yu Kilchun, which was mentioned in the preface of the *Yu Kilchun chōnsō*, has not occurred even after the 100th anniversary of Yu Kilchun’s death, nor has a systematically organized index of materials featured in *Yu Kilchun chōnsō* been created. Although research on Yu Kilchun’s life and ideology has developed over the last 40 years, with scholars applying a number of different research perspectives and methodologies, the research and discovery of materials related to Yu Kilchun have remained at a status quo over the past 40 years.

The year 1971, when *Yu Kilchun chōnsō* was published, was when Korean humanities scholars largely searched for reasons behind Korea’s transformation into a modern nation, as it marked the 100th anniversary of the opening of Korea. Even before the publication of *Yu Kilchun chōnsō*, studies focused on *Sōyu kyōnmun* as Yu’s work on modern Western civilization as a whole. However, research on Yu Kilchun in the 1970s was only the starting point for scholars in different humanities fields to find the seeds of a modern nation in traditional Korean society. As a result of scholarly efforts, remarkable research achievements regarding Yu’s political and economic ideologies, as well as in retracing his life, began to emerge.

In the 1980s, historical research on Yu Kilchun and his writings took off, as well as analytical research in various academic fields, including politics, economics, social science, Korean language, and education. Even dissertations on Yu Kilchun’s ideologies proliferated in all areas of Korean studies. Furthermore, some scholars attempted to explore the status of Yu Kilchun’s ideologies in the world history of thought among the ideologies of contemporary Chinese or Japanese intellectuals. However, the focus of research has always been on Yu’s thoughts on civilization and politics based on *Sōyu kyōnmun*.

After the 1990s, research on Yu Kilchun’s ideologies, particularly as related to politics, was expanded to explore Yu’s thoughts on foreign relations as well as the exchange and acceptance of other thought in East Asia. Some of the earlier studies concentrated on Yu’s ideas of “independence” and the “dual severance system (Yangjöl Ch’eje)” among his political

theories, and interest in this topic has grown since the 1990s. Research papers have steadily explored this topic, revealing the relationship between Yu's ideas and the arguments in Owen N. Denny's *China and Korea* written in 1888.¹ Through this, we were able to discover the level of Yu's awareness and understanding of international law at the time. However, even now, scholars offer different interpretations of the significance of "dual severance system (Yangjöl)" in Yu's political ideology and in Korea's relations with Qing China.

In terms of the flow and acceptance of thought, new research focusing on the influx of translated words and the formation process of conceptual terms have emerged. As part of this research trend, these studies have examined and reviewed the relationship between the terms Yu Kilchun used in his writings and the terms in Fukuzawa Yukichi's *Seiyo jijo* (Conditions in the West) and *Bunmeiron no gairyaku* (An outline of a theory of civilization). Recently, in particular, studies focusing on the concept of "labor" in Yu's *Nodong yahak tokbon* (A Reader for Worker's Night School) have surfaced along with studies that concentrate on the issue of his writing style.

In addition, scholars have taken active interest in dissecting Yu Kilchun's own thoughts by comparing the ideologies of people of the same period, such as Yun Ch'ihō, An Chunggūn, and Fukuzawa Yukichi, with regards to specific concepts, such as civilization, social evolution theory, political systems, peace, rights, ethics, and law. Other than research on his ideologies, a number of research has also centered on Yu's activities as part of Hansōngbuminhoe (Society of Seoul Residents), his thoughts on industry, or the activities of his family, broadening our understanding of the latter half of Yu Kilchun's life.

Particularly in Korean language and Japanese language studies, scholars have explored the terms and writing style of *Sōyu kyōnmun* and other works of Yu Kilchun in an attempt to review the sociocultural changes occurring in the Enlightenment period. Scholars in the field of Japanese

1 Owen N. Denny, *China and Korea*, Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1888.

language concentrated on his vocabulary, shedding light on how newly conceived *hanja* (Chinese Characters) terms or concepts are accepted in Yu's works.

However, it seems that research on Yu Kilchun has not made much progress in recent years and in comparison to the past. In 2000, historians attempted to highlight Yu Kilchun and his works through two special issues in academic journals, but it is difficult to say that such opportunities provided a platform for the revitalization of a new discourse on Yu Kilchun. Research papers in the fields of politics and foreign affairs have provided opinions on various topics, but, rather than expanding on previous research, these studies seem to be a repetition of the same discussions.

A close examination of the history of research on Yu Kilchun shows that previous research has only focused on *Sōyu kyōnmun* and a few other works among the number of texts that Yu Kilchun left behind. Even in terms of time period, most research has engaged in scrutinizing works that were written before the Kabo Reform period, when *Sōyu kyōnmun* was published. As a result, scholars have emphasized Yu's acquisition and acceptance of new knowledge even in research on the formation of his ideologies through his studies in Japan and the US.

As we know, Yu Kilchun was an intellectual who offered and put into place his plan for reforms to resolve the overall contradictions that Chosŏn society faced during this transitional period—the late 19th century and early 20th century—when Korea encountered the new world order. Although research on Yu should be primarily based on *Sōyu kyōnmun* there is also need for a move beyond *Sōyu kyōnmun*; it should also be expanded to the latter half of his life after the Kabo Reform period, in terms of time period, and scholars should use the whole gamut of works by Yu Kilchun in terms of research fields. In other words, we now need to develop and extend what has already been researched and published on *Yu Kilchun chōnsŏ*.

The Collection of Documents and Materials on Yu Kilchun at the Korea University Museum and the Progress of the Yu Kilchun Project

In recent years, Yu Kilchun's descendants donated to the Korea University Museum additional sources and materials that had not been available in the publication of *Yu Kilchun chōnsō* (Collected Works of Yu Kilchun) in 2003. The amount of documents and materials donated to the museum is equal to the volume of 34 20-liter boxes, and the collection of these materials consists of 2,250 items. This collection comprises books Yu owned, over a thousand letters and epistles Yu received from people in various circles, documents related to education and economic activities, drafts of his own works, written orders and letters of appointment, receipts, and notes. These documents are important primary resources that not only help revise, supplement, and expand the content of *Yu Kilchun chōnsō* but also confirm Yu's intellectual foundation and social network. In sum, the collection of materials related to Yu Kilchun housed at the Korea University Museum are useful in exploring the origin and the genealogy of modern thought in Korea as well as in delving into the personal and intellectual network and social activities of a modern Korean intellectual.

Using the primary research on the documents held by the Korea University Museum, the Center for Korean History at Korea University applied for and received the National Research Foundation of Korea grant for the project on the "the bibliographical introduction and establishment of a systemic database of newly discovered materials related to Yu Kilchun" in 2014. This project aimed to focus on Yu's own works, based on archival research based on newly discovered materials and documents, in an attempt to expand the horizons of research on Korean modernity. Therefore, rather than a simple digitization of texts, this project hopes to provide a model of "research on documenting critical editions of Yu's works" and of "research on compiling explanatory reference books." Through close inspection and corrections of already published works of

Yu Kilchun and the newly discovered drafts of his writings, we hope to trace the process of creating critical editions of Yu Kilchun's works and also provide systematic and ample information on the relationship between his texts and its historical contexts. Also, we will construct a database that links this information and digitized texts to reinforce the objectivity and scientific characteristics of the interpretations of texts.

The year 2014 marked the 100th anniversary of Yu Kilchun's death. In October 2014, the Center for Korean History co-organized an academic forum in celebration of the 100th anniversary of Yu Kilchun's death with the Korea University Museum. Researchers from China (權赫秀, Quan He-xiu) and Japan (伊藤俊介, Ito Shunsuke) were also invited to the forum to examine the trends of research on Yu Kilchun and also to revisit Yu Kilchun's works and achievements and reconsider his concepts and ideas. Papers presented at this forum have been published in *Kūndae Han'guk ūi kaehyōk kusang kwa Yu Kilchun* (The Road Map for Reform in Modern Korea and Yu Kilchun, Koryō Taehakkyo Ch'ulp'an Munhwawōn, 2015). This book comprises seven articles, two translated documents with commentary, and an original copy and translation of one newly discovered Japanese newspaper article. Part 1, titled "The Status and Challenges of Research on Yu Kilchun" provides an organized compilation of the research trends on Yu Kilchun in Korea and Japan. In Part 2, "Revisiting Yu Kilchun's Concepts," five research papers written by up and coming researchers shed new light on the structure and characteristics of Yu Kilchun's writings, such as *Segye taeseron* (Overview of General World Trends), *Chijeūi* (Views on the Land System), *Sejeūi* (Views on the Tax System), *Sōyu kyōnmun*, and *Nodong yahak tokbon* (A Reader for Worker's Night School), in relation to other pieces of writings, such as the works of Japanese intellectuals or books on international law. Part 3 titled "Translations and Commentary" presented the original copies and translations of *Segye taeseron* (Overview of General World Trends) and *Chijeūi* (Views on the Land System), which had not received much attention, in relation to *Sōyu kyōnmun*.

In May 2016, the project team disclosed parts of their research

achievements at an academic conference under the theme of “A Modern Intellectual’s Social Activities Seen Through the Collection of New Materials Related to Yu Kilchun.” This conference concentrated on introducing newly discovered materials on Yu Kilchun, which the project team had organized and managed over the previous two years, that would help expand research areas and topics—the analysis of *Chiurok* (Records of Close Acquaintances), “Semubu (Tax Department)”, and inspection copies of textbooks *Yuch’i tokbon* (Reader for Children) and *Ch’odŭnghak nongŏp taeyo* (Fundamental Agriculture Textbook) were major achievements of this project. In relation to the National Education Committee (Kungmin Kyoyukhoe), the project team also examined the Kansahoerok (Records of Board Meetings) organization and activities of the board members, as well as their relationship with the members of the committee and their relationship with Christianity. The team also performed a diachronic review of Yu Kilchun in the Japanese press. Through an examination of articles reported in Japanese newspapers, such as *Yomiuri Shinbun*, *Osaka Asahi Shinbun*, and *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun*, we were able to gain insight into the Japanese press’s awareness of Yu Kilchun and the trend of their reports.

The research presented in this academic forum was a only partial reflection of the achievements of the research project on Yu Kilchun that has been conducted in the past two years. The number of materials and documents related to Yu Kilchun that the project team discovered and organized total over 2000: first drafts of *Sōyu kyōnmun*, *Taehan munjōn* (Korean Grammar), *Pyōnghwa kwangbok ch’aeek* (Policy for the Restoration of Peace) epistles and letters to and from people of all classes and statuses such as Pak Yōnghyo and groups such as *Hansōngbuminhoe*; documents related to his industrial activities and involvement in the Mapo Ferry Association, Kyōngsōng Mill, Hansōng Lumber Corporation, and Hūngsan Company; documents related to civil organizations, such as Kyōngsong Orphanage, Women’s Benevolent Association (Jaehye Puihoe), Hansōng Sanitation Organization, and Hanja T’ongilhoe; and documents and materials related to educational institutions, such as

Yunghŭi School and Ŭnno School. In addition, new documents that describe Yu's ideas of local administrative reform from the Kabo Reform period to Kyōngsongbuminhoe (Society of Seoul Residents) in the early 1910s, as well as documents that provide a glance into the inspection and authorization process of textbooks during the Protectorate period were discovered as well. Documents and materials that have been discovered through this project will not only be able to supplement existing research on Yu Kilchun's concepts and ideas but also provide opportunities for new interpretations of Yu Kilchun's ideas on reforms. Moreover, these resources will also contribute greatly to the research on social history of the Protectorate period, which has remained unexplored territory, by reconstructing Yu Kilchun's economic and social activities after 1905.

About the Papers Published in the Special Issue

Three papers that have been included in the special issue are revised and supplemented copies of the papers that were presented at the academic forum mentioned above—"A Modern Intellectual's Social Activities Seen Through the Collection of New Materials Related to Yu Kilchun." These studies introduce new materials related to Yu Kilchun currently housed at the Korean University Museum. The following are brief summaries of the three papers published in the special issue.

Masutani Yuichi's "Yu Kilchun and His Network of Acquaintances (1881-1907)" reviews Yu's relationship with Korean and Japanese acquaintances based on *Chiurok* (Records of Close Acquaintances), two address books, and his journals, including *Haengsaek*, which contain travel logs from his trips in Japan. Masutani largely categorized Yu's personal acquaintances from the time of his studies to his return to Korea in 1907 into three groups. The first group consists of people from Keio Gijuku whom he met during his studies there. Masutani confirmed that Yu met with the alumni of Keio Gijuku through school reunions in Korea

while also involved in political activities during the Kabo Reform period. The second group Yu met was during his exile for participation in the political coup. According to his journals from 1901, Masutani confirmed that he traveled to Japan, to Shizuoka, Gifu, and Hokkaido, and met Japanese people of diverse backgrounds. The last group were members of Tonga Ch'ongnyŏnhoe (East Asian Youth Association) and Irhan Tongjihoe (Japan-Korea Friendship Society) whom Yu met after his return to Tokyo from an exile in the Ogasawara Islands. At this time, he traveled through Yamanashi, Nagano, Toyama, and Fukui, hoping to facilitate trade between Japan and Korea, and he also maintained friendship with O Sech'ang, Yi Inchik, and other figures in Korean history.

Yang Jinah's paper on "Yu Kilchun's Concept of Tax System Reform in the Taehan Empire" offers an analysis of "Semubu (Tax Department)", a document that is speculated to have been created by Yu Kilchun during his exile in Japan during the reign of Emperor Kojong of the Taehan Empire. Semubu criticizes the trend of the tax system, in which the authority to impose and collect taxes had been taken away from the local magistrates and the *isŏ* class during the Kabo Reforms was once again returned to them. In Semubu, Yu devised a tax reform based on the *chu-kun-hyang-ri* system. Separate from the national taxes, he proposed the establishment of local taxes to fund local governments as surtaxes on national taxes. He also asserted that the amount of imposed taxes should be determined through local assemblies that were granted the authority to deliberate the local government's budget. He endowed the overall authority for tax administration—to review tax resources, levy, collect, and receive taxes—to the *hyang*, which was to be a new governing administrative unit. Yang revealed that Yu's new idea for the tax system reform proposed to eliminate the local magistrates and the *isŏ* class completely, as they had been problematic in the existing tax collection process, by granting the authority to review tax resources, levy and collect taxes on the *hyang*-level government instead of the *kun*-level government.

"Textbook Inspection and Censorship in Korea during the Protectorate Period: A Study of Inspection Copies of Textbooks Compiled by the

Young Korean Academy” by Kim Soyoun provides an insight on the inspection copies of textbooks published by the Young Korean Academy (Hüngsadan), which was included in the “Collection of new materials related to Yu Kilchun.” Focusing on the fact that Japan established a censorship system and administered censorship of the media and publications since the Protectorate period, Kim examined the early phase of the newly established censorship system in modern Korea. Then she analyzed general bibliographic information such as the writer, publisher, year of publication, usage, and table of contents as well as other items of interest that provide deeper insight into the inspection and censorship process. This study investigated the censors who had been in charge of the inspection of the texts, as their names had been recorded on the inspection copies of textbooks, as well as whether these textbooks were published after the inspection. Through the introduction and analysis of the inspection copies of textbooks that had been newly discovered, Kim presented a case study of textbook inspection and censorship in the Protectorate period.

Lastly, I would like to elaborate on the progress of the Yu Kilchun project. This project will continue into the next year. In the final year we have left, we will focus on categorizing the documents by topic and produce explanatory reference books of the texts. Once the project is finished, explanatory reference books on the materials, digitized images of the materials, and digitized texts of the documents that had been produced in the first and the second years of the project will be made available to researchers. Moreover, we hope to hold another academic forum, as we had this year, to introduce the contents of the new materials and documents, and also to provide a platform for scholars to continue to seek out new directions for research on Yu Kilchun. As we are working on introducing new historical documents and materials to the academia, I believe that it will make a great contribution to the understanding of Yu Kilchun and his thought, and, furthermore, to modern Korean society.

