

Yu Kil-jun (兪吉濬)'s Perception on the International Order —Between the Tributary System and the International Order of Equal Sovereignty

by KIM Bong-jin

Yu Kil-jun asserts, in his article titled “Bangkuk ui Kwonli (邦国の權利)”, the equal right of states under the “equal sovereignty” concept of modern Western international law [or order]. However, his “equal sovereignty” derives not only from the natural law of Western thought but from the natural right of “Chǒnli (天理)” in neo-Confucian thought. In other words, modern and traditional thought are integrated, and produce a new kind of concept.

He describes the system of double standards (兩截驛制) by way of criticizing the intervention of suzerain (受貢国) in domestic affairs and diplomacy of the vassal state (贈貢国). In the system of double standards, which was formed at that time between Chosŏn (朝鮮) and China (清国), the traditional tributary system had been changed into a more unequal one than before. After Chosŏn had entered into an equal relationship with Western states, she was suffering from the incompatibility between the tributary system and the Western international system.

He criticizes the “changed” tributary system and the system of double standards that was caused by China’s intervention. And, by denying the existence of colony (属国), he criticizes the Great Power’s colonism or the negative side of modern Western international law [or order].

In sum, he proposed constructing a new international order which would be based on the equal right of the state under the “really equal sovereignty”. If this new order would come into its own, it could harmonize the positive side of the modern Western international order and of the tributary system.