

Yu Kil-jun (兪吉濬)'s Perception of the Modern State

by KIM Bong-jin

In Yu Kil-jun's enlightenment thought, tradition coexists with modernity. But we cannot say that his thought is a simple mixture of tradition and modernity. Both of them raise chemical reactions with each other in his thought, and produce a new kind of modernity or tradition. So we have to find out about 'the new product' in his view of the modern state. Not by prescribing that tradition is conservative, particular or wrong; nor that modernity is progressive, universal or right, but by understanding that both of them have their own values from which each could learn from the other.

Bearing this in mind, I will consider Yu Kil-jun's perception of the modern state which appears throughout his writings, particularly in *Sōyu-kyōnmun* (『西遊見聞』). This subject is divided into four arguments looking at the national, the people's, and the monarch's rights and the constitutional monarchy. Before dealing with these arguments, in relation to these, his theory of civilization is examined first.

His perception of the modern state as his theory of civilization is characterized by aspects of relativism, mutualism, and moralism which are based on neo-Confucianism, i.e. traditional thought rather than modern Western thought. That is, in the process of the introduction of modern thought he intended not only to comply with its strengths on the one hand, but also to keep its defects out of the good points in traditional thought as a matter of course.

With regard to this, some may think that he has a 'conservative, pre-modern or anachronistic' way of thinking. Certainly it could be judged in

this way in accordance with the modern period when modern Western thought was the only standard for evaluation. But nowadays, when we are about to enter the 21st century and are talking about post-modernity, in my judgment, his thought has to be re-evaluated. It could be argued that there is a form of post-modernity trying to surface in his thought.