The Politics of *Jeong* and Ethical Civil Society in South Korea

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Abstract

In this essay, I investigate how the cultural practice of jeong *and a uniquely Korean collective moral responsibility, or* uri*-responsibility, which it entails, have contributed to the recent reinvigoration of ethical civil society in democratized Korea by focusing on three civil action cases. In order to do so, first, I critically examine key concepts like* uri *and* jeong*, and challenge the conventional image of* uri *as an overweening group identity that promotes social conformism by contrasting it with the pathological group-ego. Special attention will be given to the family-relational characteristic of* uri *and two dimensions of* jeong *(*miun jeong *and* goun jeong*). Then I explore the political implications of* uri *in civil society by likening it to Rousseau's general will, and finally highlight the cultural peculiarity of* uri*-responsibility by comparing and contrasting it with two Kantian-liberal accounts of responsibility, on the one hand, and with Jaspers' "metaphysical responsibility," on the other. The essay concludes by revisiting the "ethical" vision in the classical ideal of modern civil society and by presenting a* jeong*-based ethical civil society as the most politically practicable and culturally relevant Korean alternative.*

Keywords: *uri*, *jeong*, civil society, *uri*-responsibility, Kantian responsibility, metaphysical responsibility

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Introduction

If there is one thing that can tellingly distinguish Korean democracy from post-communist democracies in Eastern and Central Europe, it is to be sure the extraordinary vibrancy of civil society in democratized Korea (Kim Sunhyuk 2004). It is literally "extraordinary" because, among Western observers, it has been constantly reported that there is a salient contrast between a plethora of political actions and civil movements in democratizing post-communist countries and a frustrating paucity of civic engagement in their democratized counterparts (Howard 2003; Markus 2001). Considering the similar transitional experience—about which political scientist Terry Karl (1990) termed a "mass-ascendant" mode of democratization[1]—in which "ethical civil society"[2] played a pivotal role in breaking down the (post-communist or pseudo-democratic) bureaucratic authoritarian regime, a marked contrast in the viability of civil society between democratized Korea and its Eastern and Central European counterparts is nothing but puzzling.

For most comparative political scientists, the most eminent question has been, "Why such a sudden disappearance of civic energy in post-communist Europe?" Most often, the inertial lifestyle that the previous rigid party-state has engendered over the last half-century has been singled out as the most crucial source of the problem. That is, blame is placed on the citizenry's fundamental dependence on the party-state for virtually everything concerning their life: jobs, income, consumer goods, education, housing, health care, and social and geographic mobility (Bunce 1999, 24). Recently, Marc Howard has submitted that a lack of desire to participate in voluntary organizations in the post-communist people follows from their past life experience

1. For a detailed discussion of the mass-ascendant or civil society-led democratization, see O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986, chap. 5) and Tismaneanu (1992).
2. This particular characterization originally referred to Polish civil society (Linz and Stepan 1996, 271). But it is now widely acknowledged that ethical civil society was the defining characteristic of the democratic transition in Eastern and Central post-communist countries (see Tismaneanu 2001).

under the ossified bureaucratic authoritarian regime that had widened the gap between authentic private and hypocritical public lives, deepened the mistrust of formal political organizations, and fostered friendship networks in the private sphere (Howard 2003, 26-29). Then, it should be asked, why is there such a massive continuity between democratizing civil society and consolidating civil society in South Korea? Can the "neo-institutionalist" reasoning of the kind Bunce and Howard adopt adequately explain the current viability of Korean ethical civil society? Besides, has not it been ceaselessly argued that, once democratized, mass-ascendant civil societies should go back to "normality" for democratic consolidation?[3] How then can we make sense of today's Korean civil society that is enormously viable in its mode, on the one hand, and fundamentally ethical in its character, on the other?

First of all, it should be noted, the ethical character of Korean civil society is qualitatively different from that found in post-communist Europe. There, as Vaclav Havel (1985) famously noted, "living within a lie" confronted "living within the truth"; that is, the demands of the post-totalitarian system conflicted with the real aims of life. So, in the truest sense, the revolution of 1989 had a liberating force, of which energy was devoted to overcoming the system-induced alienation of the (authentic) private life from the (hypocritical) public life and that of the public self from the private self. Put differently, it was ethical in that it aimed at restoring citizenship and therewith truly authentic and empowered individuality.[4]

Despite the similar confrontational legacy, however, Korean ethical civil society seems to hardly be predicated on a(n) (European) humanism that purports to overcome self-alienation. It is not to say that this aspect is absolutely foreign to Korean civil society. The student-led protests and civil movements in the 1970s and 1980s indeed had such characteristics (see Kim Sunhyuk 1998). But a Korean civil

3. For this argument, see Diamond (1999) and Fish (1994).

4. Timothy Ash states that the revolution of 1989 was "a springtime of nations, but not necessarily of nationalism; of societies, aspiring to be civil; and above all, of citizens" (Ash 1999, 119).

society that is still viable nearly two decades after democratization and that has become far less ideologically rigid and far more quotidian and spontaneous must have been (and still be) propelled by different ethical energy. Can humanism alone properly come to terms with the fact that thousands of people (across generations, across social distinction, across political differences, and beyond regional antagonism), holding candlelight in one hand, gathered at the center of Seoul in order to repose the souls of the two Korean teenage girls who had been struck by a U.S. military vehicle and to solemnly reclaim Korean citizenship against, on the one side, the helpless national government, and, on the other, the unequal terms of the treaty with the foreign superpower? (case 1) Some would be persuaded that it is anti-Americanism or nationalism. Fair enough. But can nationalism explain as well the active civic engagement by tens of thousands of ordinary Korean citizens in seeking collective public measures for a teenage girl who strangled her violent, alcoholic father to death? (case 2) And what about the recent upheaval of Korean civil society around the revision to the Act on the Immigration and Legal Status of Overseas Koreans? (case 3) If it is neither humanism nor nationalism, what could it be that penetrates all three mutually independent civil action cases? Can there be such an all-encompassing psychological and cultural mechanism in the heavily diversified, if not fragmented, contemporary Korean society?

In this essay, I argue that all three cases can be explained in terms of the cultural practice of *jeong*, the Koreans' affectionate, familial sentiments. In other words, in Korea, *jeong* functions as a vital ethical force in invigorating Korean civil society and empowering Korean citizenship. One may be surprised at, or even skeptical about, the relevance of *jeong* as a conceptual key to understanding the viability of Korean civil society in an immensely individualized, rationalized, Westernized, and, above all, globalized contemporary Korean society.[5] True, as far as ordinary interpersonal relationships

5. This skepticism was expressed by Roger Janelli (1993) as early as a decade ago. According to Kim Ju-hui's (1992) cultural anthropology of *jeong*, *jeong* is basically a local phenomenon of agricultural background.

are concerned, *jeong* appears to have been sapped in Koreans' "apartmentalized" everyday life.[6] But once we turn to public actions, it can be seen everywhere that it is neither closed nationalism nor universal humanism, neither fanatic collectivism nor liberal individualism, but *jeong* as a complex mediating factor that activates Korean civil society on and off-line.

However, that Koreans are socially and politically mobilized in and through *jeong* does not necessarily mean that Korean ethical civil society is collectivistic in nature, nor that it is totalitarian and suffocating the value of individuality. In a social psychological study of Korean people, Choi Sang-Chin—although he is more concerned with a socio-culturally formed group-self than a "politically-constituted" group-self—has found that Korea's *jeong*-based group-self (or *uri*-self) is not so much interlocked with an individuality-collapsing hierarchical collectivism, as it is with Japan, but, rather, that it is associated with semi-familial, horizontal relationality among the individual participants (Choi S. 1993; 2000, 152-159). As being grounded in the social-psychological *uri*-self, on the one hand, and yet politically constituted, on the other, Korea's ethical civil society is rather collective in that it mediates collectivism and individualism.[7] To borrow the psychoanalyst Winnicott's famous term, *jeong* serves as a "transitional space" between self and other (Alford 1999, 49). According to Hahm Pyong-choon (1986, 323), *jeong* refers to the "overlapping of egos" rather than a "merger or fusion of egos" that could lead to collective fanaticism or expansionist nationalism. With Markus and Kitayama (1991), we can call such an intersubjectively constituted self an "interdependent self" to distinguish it from an "independent self." So what Korea's *jeong*-induced civil society contributes to is not

6. According to Han Gyuseog and Shin Soo-jin's recent social-psychological study (2000) among young Koreans, horizontal individualism rather than vertical collectivism, which is more widely found in their older counterparts whose interpersonal relationships are allegedly embedded in *jeong*, is becoming an increasingly salient cultural profile.

7. For the inadequacy of approaching the social psychological dynamic of Korea's *jeong*-based group-self in terms of the schizophrenic binary of "individualism and collectivism," see Choi S. (1998, 245).

just the empowerment of individual agency, which is the goal of Western and Eastern European civil societies, but that of interdependent individuals' shared (political) identity, collective freedom, and eventually citizenship.

At the heart of *jeong*-induced collective action is the Korean citizens' collectively shared sense of responsibility, or what I call "*uri*-responsibility." What is surprising and peculiarly Korean about this collective moral responsibility is that it mediates Kant's two types of responsibility (moral/criminal responsibility, on the one hand, and collective/political responsibility, on the other), which are prevalent in the West. On the other hand, despite some apparent similarities, Korea's *uri*-responsibility, as a culture-specific political practice, is qualitatively different from what Karl Jaspers calls "metaphysical responsibility," that is essentially universal in its nature. Therefore, the central focus of this essay is twofold: to explore (1) what exactly *uri*-responsibility is as distinguished from the West's accounts of responsibility and (2) how to theorize a uniquely Korean civil society based on its cultural resources like *jeong* and *uri*-responsibility.

The essay consists of five sections. After this introductory section (Section I), Section II showcases three recent civil action cases that are believed to best demonstrate how *jeong*-induced *uri*-responsibility has been creatively accommodated in the Western-originated modern civil society in democratized Korea. Section III is mainly devoted to the conceptual clarification of key concepts like *uri* and *jeong* from a social-psychological and psycho-cultural perspective as a preparatory step to construct *uri*-responsibility as an intelligible social scientific concept. Particularly, this section will challenge the conventional image of *uri* as an overweening group identity that promotes social conformism by contrasting the *jeong*-induced *uri*-self centered on the inner relationality of the individual participants in it, to the self-containing group-ego solidifying its inner-world by pathologically homogenizing all of its parts. *Miun jeong* (affectionate hatred) will be given special focus as what helps to prevent *uri* from becoming a pathological group-ego. Section IV explores the political implications of *uri* in civil society by likening it to Rousseau's famous notion of the "general

will" and, finally, highlights the cultural peculiarity of *uri*-responsibility by comparing and contrasting it with two Kantian accounts of responsibility, on the one hand, and Karl Jaspers' metaphysical responsibility, on the other. The essay concludes by emphasizing the centrality of ethical civil society to democratic empowerment by revisiting the modern ideal of civil society, and by presenting a *jeong*-based ethical civil society as the most politically practicable and culturally relevant to the invigoration of Korean democracy.

Three Core Cases

Case 1: Candlelight Vigil Demonstration (2002-2003)

On June 13, 2002, two Korean teenage girls, while walking on a local road, were struck by a U.S. military vehicle returning from official duty. According to the SOFA (Status of Forces Agreement) between the U.S. and the Republic of Korea, which dates to 1966, if an accident takes place during official duties, the U.S. Army has the right of initial investigation and jurisdiction over the soldiers unless an objection is raised by the Korean government. Due to the U.S. government's declining to hand over right of jurisdiction to the Korean government, their own lukewarm reaction to the issue, and more directly, the U.S. military court's acquittal of the two soldiers, what began as a local reaction to a local question was exacerbated into a nationwide public frustration, leading to demands for a revision of SOFA.[8]

Public frustration hit its apex when the U.S. military court found the two accused U.S. soldiers not guilty. From November 2002 to January 2003, millions of Korean citizens crowded virtually all public squares, not only to demand a revision to SOFA, to make it on more equal terms, but also to declare sovereign Korean citizenship. What was notable in these series of civil demonstrations were the candlelight vigils held to repose the forsaken souls of the girls, in which not only ideologically radical young Koreans but, more impressively, a multitude of ordinary citizens including many, usually politically conservative, seniors joined. Why this national civil action across generations and political ideologies? Nationalism was presented as one powerful answer by the conservative news media. But is nationalism a sufficient explanation?

To understand the nature of the issue, it is of great importance to note that people were all the more saddened by the news that the two girls' (respective) parents decided not to take New Year's greetings from their other children because they felt strongly that they were responsible for the deaths of their daughters. Even though it was not factually the case, even preposterous from a rational standpoint, the parents felt a deep sense of responsibility. Even more striking, the Korean people, deeply moved, also felt it.

This case shows that a seemingly direct causal connection between the two Korean girls' deaths and the Koreans' nationwide civil demand for a revision of SOFA is not in fact "causal," but heavily convoluted. What is puzzling is how the feeling of sorrow ("desire") could be transformed into the "rational and civil" demand for legal justice ("reason"), instead of turning into violence. What bridged the potentially violent desire (nationwide sorrow) to disciplined civil actions for legal justice was a uniquely Korean sense of responsibility of the kind felt by the girls' parents: "We are the parents who killed our own kids." Apparently, this responsibility has nothing to do with the liberal and causal notion of responsibility ("I'm responsible for this because I chose to do it."). From a liberal standpoint, it is illogical. But surprisingly, many Koreans who raised their candles deeply felt the same responsibility: "It is we (*uri*) who killed Hyosun and Misun [Miseon] because we (*uri*) could not protect them, because we are weak and we failed to revise the Law beforehand." Of course, a revision of SOFA would not have prevented the innocent losses. In fact, the reasoning is flawed. But this was how the Koreans made sense of the issue, bringing to their consciousness the meaning of not only being, but also becoming, a citi-

8. For details of the case, see Kim G. (2005). For a full political theoretical analysis of this case, Kim S. (forthcoming).

zen in the "*uri*-world."

Case 2: Public Reaction to the Teenage Girl Lee's Patricide (2005)

On April 16, 2005, a 14-year old Korean girl, Lee, was arrested for the charge of patricide. Her father, an alcoholic, had been beating his ill parents and Lee, his only child, over the past decade. Lee's mother, sick of her drunkard husband and his constant violence, ran away when Lee was just over three months old, and has not been heard from since. On the day of the incident, Lee's drunken father was beating his elderly parents as well as Lee, who was trying to hold him back. So afraid that the father, who was wielding a kitchen knife, might turn to murder, Lee strangled him to death while trying to protect her grandparents. It is reported that while Lee was attempting to restrain her father from beating her grandparents, she called 112 twice for help. When the police arrived, Lee immediately confessed her murder and then, although widely perceived as unnecessary, was sent to an adult criminal jail. According to the Korean Criminal Law, any person above fourteen years of age is legally liable for punishment.

"The Lee case" could have passed out of public interest after some commotion like many other cases of family violence. Surprisingly, it was after Lee's diary was released to the public that "the Lee case" elicited nationwide attention. One particular passage of the diary reads: "Today was a tough day. It is now 10:15 pm. Daddy drank again and acted weird. What if he didn't drink? I hate drinking. *Poor daddy*. . . . Anyhow, today was a tougher day than usual, and I don't know why. I'm such an idiot. [By the way] my pretty grandma says she will make *bibimbap* for me. Good! That's enough writing for today because I don't want to worry anymore" (*OhmyNews*, January 15, 2005). What stirred Koreans most was Lee's ambivalent feelings toward her violent father: great sympathy and unavoidable enmity, that is, what Koreans call *miun jeong* (affectionate hatred), by which she could sustain responsibility for the, however torn, affectionate, familial relationship with her father. Of course, from a liberal, feminist viewpoint that understands familial relations in terms of power, Lee's *jeong* would be nothing other than unjust submission to parental power, but it was not deemed so by ordinary Koreans.

Apparently, Koreans were torn. On one side, over 95% of polled Koreans, stirred by the story of Lee's miserable life, flooded the Gangneung police office website with thousands of comments, asking that her pitiable circumstances be taken into consideration. Some immediately formed a joint committee encompassing dozens of citizen-led civic groups. On the other side, however, were those who demanded strict legal treatment in order to secure the rule of law. Nevertheless, neither a complete acquittal of criminal charges (absolute sympathy) nor strict legality (the rule of law) seemed to satisfy most Koreans. How could they settle the seemingly contradictory requirements of sympathy, on the one hand, and those of the law, on the other?

For many Koreans, Lee's misery was not taken merely as a personal mental illness or private misery, but was thought to represent a public illness—the failure of education, insufficiency of institutional apparatus to protect this poor girl, and, above all, Koreans' fundamental nonchalance towards family violence: "*We* all knew about the situations that drove the middle school student [Lee] to murder her father. Why did *we*, now able to see clearly [what caused Lee's patricide], let it happen? And why had *we* negligently left the father to be an alcoholic? It is probably because of the mores of *our* society that do not care about anything except perhaps [such a dreadful incident as] murder" (from a reply posted by one netizen, emphases added). Again, from a purely legal and rational standpoint, this reasoning is far-fetched. But, certainly, Korean *jeong* defies logical causation.

The Korean breakthrough for the contradiction between sympathy and the law (or crime) was to "humanize" the law and legal procedures by stating, "The law is said to have *injeong* as well" and "The law is said to have tears." It was by discovering the uniquely Korean collective moral responsibility (*uri*-responsibility) that Koreans could—though only "partly"—transfer the source of the responsibility from a private person to all members of civil society. By cre-

atively wedding *jeong* to the modern legal system and thereby avoiding both extreme sympathy and cold legality, Koreans could collectively cope with an evil without letting go of the girl's (individual) criminal guilt.

Case 3: The Civil Upheaval around Dual Citizen Military Dodgers (2005)

On June 29, 2005, the National Assembly in Korea roundly rejected a law that would strip those who abandoned their Korean citizenship to avoid the military draft of their status as overseas Koreans and deprive them of all rights as Koreans. Reacting to this decision, most Koreans raised a great uproar because the revision to the Act on the Immigration and Legal Status of Overseas Koreans had been regarded as a due follow-up to the May 2005 revision of the Nationality Law that bars dual citizens from giving up their Korean citizenship unless they complete mandatory military service. In fact, the revision was submitted by a lawmaker of the opposition party and was greeted with a landslide of popular support, as it had been observed that long lines of young dual nationals were forming at immigration offices to resign their Korean citizenship before the law went into effect.

Thousands of frustrated "ordinary" Korean citizens not only vehemently demanded that the names of those who voted against the bill be publicized—especially those "betrayers" who had rooted for the bill in the earlier stage of legislation and then withdrew their support. Some of them went further to organize a candlelight demonstration and launch new civic groups to press the legislature. Why such a fuss? Some liberals pointed out the danger of "statism" or "nationalism" that would threaten to thwart globalization. Others regretted the ordinary Koreans' ignorance of the modern principle of citizenship/nationality, that is, citizenship as a private right, hence a matter of personal choice. But does liberal individualism on which these questions are tacitly grounded truly represent ordinary Koreans' view of citizenship?

Despite some liberals' framing the issue in terms of liberal individualism versus conservative nationalism, what complicated the issue was whether citizenship could be decoupled from social obligations. What most Koreans could not understand was the "liberal" idea that citizenship is a matter of the law and ultimately that of private choice. It was the concept of a pure individual right, or in Michael Sandel's words (1998) an "unencumbered" self's claim to the absolute right to private happiness that ordinary Koreans could not make sense of. What infuriated them was not dual citizenship per se, but the fact that it was taken advantage of as a convenient means to circumvent collective obligations, thus making citizenship socially void and rendering the law (constitution) to be only a matter of parchment.

At stake was not whether or not an individual's private right is bad. The real issue consisted in some dual citizens' lack of *uri*-responsibility, a collective responsibility of the kind proposed in one netizen's following proposal: "Let *us* make efforts, with sharp reason and calm judgment, to rebuild *our* mother country Korea on the right foundation and let the deserving leader lead it. [After all] the true patriots of this country are us, people, who silently yet assiduously do what is to be done. Shouldn't it then be none other than us who take responsibility to change *our* country?" (*OhmyNews*, June 15, 2005, ID: jkrho777)

Uri-responsibility is not a blind attachment to the nation, or patriotism about which Leo Strauss (1958, 11) ridiculed as "collective selfishness." *Uri*-responsibility works through *jeong*, especially *miun jeong* (affectionate hatred) in this particular case. It was not that Koreans all love their country no matter what, but because, despite all the problems of which they are acutely aware and, for the most part, not individually responsible for incurring, they were "nonetheless" willing to take responsibility for them. Thus understood, *uri*-responsibility that works on both *goun jeong* (affection) and *miun jeong* (affectionate hatred)[9] constitutes the very meaning of the per-

9. For the social psychological study of *goun jeong* and *minun jeong*, see Choi S. et al. (2000).

son's social right, and this special sense of collective moral responsibility underpins the national consciousness, the backbone of civil society, and the matrix of citizenship according to Edward Shils (1997, 207-209).

The Social Psychology of *Uri* and *Jeong*

Uri

In his rebuttal against Cho Hein's article (1997) that finds the origin of the contemporary viability of Korean civil society in traditional Confucian culture, David Steinberg (1997, 151) chastised Koreans' "we-ism," which in his view has served to foster a "spirit of conformity," as the single greatest obstacle to the establishment of truly "civil" society in Korea. Implicit in Steinberg's criticism is that the Korean "we" or "*uri*" is so fundamentally and overbearingly a primordial and pre-political group identity that it is incompatible with the basic requirements of the authentic civil society to which social and political pluralism is central.

However, Steinberg fails to distinguish the political *uri* from the social-psychological *uri* by associating *uri* exclusively with the latter, especially with its negative aspects. On the social-psychological level, Steinberg's claim could gain relevance because, according to Choi Sang-Chin (1998, 246), a renowned scholar on this subject, the Koreans understand we as including as its inherent properties "identity, oneness, mutual dependence, mutual protection, and mutual acceptance" to the extent that "Korean's private self (or individual self) and social self (or collectivized self) overlap." To be sure, the social-psychologically constituted *uri* in Korean society is qualitatively different from the social group in the West's liberal tradition, which is more of a "collective pool" wherein the personal identity of the independent, autonomous, and discrete self is preserved, because *uri* is accompanied by the group-specific self-transformation of individual participants, generating a unique group dynamic of which a mere collective pool cannot avail itself (Choi S. 145).

But to argue that individuality-annihilating social conformism is the only and the most salient characteristic of the group dynamic of *uri* is not only far-fetched, but also misleading. What Steinberg overlooks is that the social formation of *uri* has nothing to do with "deindividuation" in which the self-identity simply collapses within the group. What it entails is rather "depersonalization," to which the retaining of individual self-identity is absolutely indispensable (Choi S. 2000, 149). To see the difference between deindividuation and depersonalization more clearly, it should be noted that the Korean self is hardly the entity-like, self-containing, and autonomously functioning "independent self" as customarily conceptualized in the Western scientific psychology and as naturalized in the West's modern political theory (e.g., social contract theory). For the independent self, depersonalization is no different than deindividuation, which is tantamount to the total collapse of the self or the self's complete fusion with the group, which was the case with the Nazi doctors (Lifton 1986). In this psychological process, the individual egos are enmeshed in the "group-ego," enabling the latter to be the only meaningful and living, yet often immensely violent, agent.

In marked contrast, the "interdependent self" that constitutes the Korean "I" (Choi S. and Kim G. 1999) scarcely undergoes a total collapse of the self, which generates a massive fusion with the group-self that forms a group-ego. Since it does not attempt the containment of the pure self (a rationally controlled, self-sufficient self) from others and since it does not construe interdependence as pathetic dependence, the interdependent self seldom experiences a violent eruption of the group-ego (this is why group-psychology is still unpopular in Korea). Instead, the personal empowerment of the interdependent self is made possible by forming *uri*-relationship with other equally interdependent selves. As such, *uri* is the fundamentally relation-centered group-self, unlike the self-contained, power-seeking group-ego, that emerges when the self-contained independent self disintegrates. Therefore, while the latter is the fusion of egos, the former *only* refers to the overlapping of egos.

That Korean *uri* is qualitatively different from the pathological group-ego is not to insist that *uri* is immune from its own problems. As Steinberg rightly points out, downward social conformism is *one* of its negative functions. Nevertheless, the following must be remembered: First, *uri*, as a social-psychological construct, is not a pure primordial group identity as some critics assume; second, *uri* is primarily concerned with affectionate internal relations among the participants; and finally, heavy social conformism is one negative factor, however occasionally, that accompanies *uri*, and not, by any means, its full essence. All in all, *uri* cannot be identified as the all-encompassing group-ego that is inherently dangerous. What then helps to prevent *uri* from deteriorating into a dangerous group-ego? To this, I now turn.

Jeong

Roughly speaking, it can be said, *jeong* is what makes such "intersubjective overlapping" possible by providing an emotional glue or a "transitional space," in and through which interdependent selves can freely flow into each other (Alford 1999; Choi S. and Lee 1999; Choi S. et al. 2000; Kim Y. 1995). Although *jeong* is oftentimes spoken of in terms of a person's inner characteristic (*jeong* as personality), its more significant and widely performed usage is as affectionate "relationality" in Koreans' ordinary interpersonal relations. But, this analytical distinction should not be too rigidly held because, in reality, the two are inextricably intertwined. That is, personal *jeong* is what makes an otherwise monadic and container-like closed self into the interdependent self that is marked by a porous and relational *jeong*. This *jeong*, in turn, by constantly situating an interdependent self in intersubjective *uri*-relationships, helps to internalize such intersubjective relationality within the self, making relationality integral to personality. In the most profound sense, the Korean interdependent self is a jeongish self and the Korean self is fundamentally relational.

That *jeong* is relationality, however, does not imply that any relationality is directly analogous to *jeong*, just as any interdependent self could not be the Korean self. For social relationality to be jeongish relationality, it should be oriented to the creation of *uri*-relationship. That is, *jeong* is a felt *uri*-ness and *uri*-ness is a recognized *jeong* (Choi S. and Lee 2000b, 224). This seemingly tautological explanation, however, is neither illogical nor irrational if we consider that the relational boundary that *uri*-ness (or *uri*-self) sets up is, in essence, a cultural-epistemological boundary as well. In other words, the social function of the *uri* boundary is not limited in separating *uri* from the other, which could constitute exclusive *uri*-ness. Its further-reaching social implication is that it produces its own verbal and non-verbal semiotic practices which foreigners, who are not immersed in Korean culture, often find difficult to master. *Jeong* is the very key to such semiotic cultural code. In short, *jeong* is an emotionally cognitive *uri*-oriented relationality. Only within *uri* is *jeong* enlivened. Outside *uri* is the realm of *mujeong* (the absence of *jeong*); the realm of *mujeong* is where relation ends and an "evil" prevails. For Koreans, outside *is* evil (Alford 1999, 104).

What then is the "cultural-epistemological boundary," which *uri*-self is modeled after and is to reproduce in broader social relations? Among Korean scholars, it is widely echoed that traditional Korean family relations present the prototype of *uri*-self, and they are strongly convinced as well that *jeong* originates from them, particularly from a strong psychological attachment between parents (particularly, mother) and children (Choi S. et al. 2000; Choi S. and Han 1999; see particularly Choi S. and Lee 1999, 230). Furthermore, given the allegedly strong connection between *jeong* and the family, some are not hesitant to affiliate *jeong* with Confucian family relations and even with the Confucian family structure (Cho Haejoang 1998; Choi B. 1994). Rather than delving into a still controversial socio-historical origin of *jeong*, however, I want to stress that (traditional) family is the most important social metaphor of the Koreans' collective identity of all sizes. That is to say, when it is applied to the entire nation, "family-relational *uri*" constitutes the core of the "imagined community" of ordinary Koreans. More importantly, what distinguishes Korea's *uri* imagined community from other imagined communities is

that it is a *jeong*-based ethico-cultural and cultural-epistemological entity.[10]

Having found that *jeong* is *uri*-building (semi-)familial relationality, we can finally come to a better grasp of the internal structure of *jeong*ish relationality. Since the family, except in the case of marriage, is a natural given, jeongish relationality can hardly be equated with the affectionate sentiment (*goun jeong*) per se, because immense psychological tensions that tend to engender devastating mental illness among the family members are no less significant and integral to family relations, the best example of which is the chronic conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law (Rhi 1998). What is interesting about the ordinary Koreans' social psychology is that, when it has been fairly long and constantly experienced, they count (and experience) a feeling of hatred toward their intimate ones, as another form of affection. Koreans call it "*miun jeong*" (affectionate hatred) (Choi S. et al. 2000). This oxymoronic sentiment is generated when the people have long experienced all aspects of human relations (good or bad and joyful or painful) and maturely sublimated them into their relational, interdependent selfhood. It is, for example, a sort of mixed feeling that a daughter-in-law would feel after she has departed from her husband's family to start her own nuclear family: "I have come to have both *miun jeong* and *goun jeong* with my mother-in-law while having been entangled in all sorts of tensions and conflicts over the years."

Denser and deeper *jeong* is one that has been steadily accumulated by the interlocking of *miun jeong* and *goun jeong*. If one attempts to look at the Korean family relation and by extension Korean *uri*-relation in terms of "power," as Susan Okin (1989) does, the internal mechanism of *jeong*, especially its *miun jeong* aspect, can be easily eclipsed. Then, it would be impossible to appropriately make sense of *uri*-responsibility of the kind that we have seen in the core cases presented above, because *uri*-responsibility is nourished on *jeong* that includes not only *goun jeong* but, more crucially, *miun jeong*.

10. For how this special cultural entity operates, see Choi S. (1998, 252-258; 2000, 102-120) and Choi S. and Kim C. (1998).

Thus far, we have examined the social psychology of *uri* and the basics of *jeong* and jeongish relationality in the course of problematizing the conventional understanding of *uri* submitted by Steinberg. The point is that *uri* as a complex social psychological construct cannot be identified to be an overweening collective identity that simply promotes conformism. Nor can it be the same thing with the tyranny of majority or mob rule. One more important point that many, including Steinberg, tend to gloss over, however, is that *uri* is not only a socio-psychological or psycho-cultural construct, but it is also a political practice when *uri*-responsibility rooted in *jeong* is "exercised" in the public space. Of course, the political *uri* is profoundly predicated on the various levels, and types, of social practice of *uri*-formation. But the political practice of *uri*-formation is occasioned in the course of constructing the "*uri*-world" that is an open and all-seeing public space. From this perspective, the recent invigoration of civil society in Korea cannot be approached in terms of a natural and unmediated extension of the psycho-cultural *uri*. The cases above show another, namely, political dynamic of *uri*-formation that cannot plainly be reduced to social psychology alone.

Uri-World and *Uri*-Responsibility

Uri-*World and General Will*

How can we make political sense of *uri*-formation in civil society? In order to do so, we can enlist the help of Rousseau whose famous notion of general will, just like Korean *uri*, has encountered mounting criticisms because of its allegedly undifferentiating, undemocratic, or anti-political characteristic (Starobinski 1988). But first let us see how Rousseau defines this controversial concept.

> "Each one of us puts into the community his person and all his powers under the supreme direction of the general will; and as a

> body, we incorporate every member as an indivisible part of the whole." Immediately, in place of the individual person of each contracting party, this act of association creates an artificial and collective body composed of as many members as there are voters in the assembly, and by this same act that body acquires its unity, its common ego, its life and its will (Rousseau 1968, 61).

The point Rousseau's critics make is that the general will featured in *The Social Contract* advocates a total dissolution of the self into collectivity or the complete negation of difference, hence contributing to the formation of a power-seeking, pathological group-ego. But, in *The Government of Poland*, by which Rousseau attempted to apply his social contract theory to Poland's actual political setting, the meaning of general will is rendered to be far more pragmatic.

> [Now] the law, which is merely the expression of the *general will*, is certainly the product of the interplay of all sectional interests, combining with and balancing one another in all their variety (Rousseau 1985, 42: emphasis added).

Rousseau clarifies that the general will is "the product of interplay of all sectional interests" rather than the coercive annihilation of private interests. Thus, Benjamin Barber, one of the most vehement contemporary Rousseauians, understands the general will in the context of legitimacy. According to Barber, what is important for Rousseau is not so much a schizophrenic splitting between individuality (private interests) and collectivity (common interests) or a zero-sum relation between the two, but how to create legitimacy through a dialectical interplay of them. So, Barber submits:

> Legitimacy here is awarded not to the virtuous interest but to the general will, the will that incarnates a democratic community that is comprised in turn of the wills of autonomous citizens. The issue is not "I want" versus "you want" but "I want" versus "we will.". . . But wills cannot all be equally legitimate in the same sense, because by willing one affects the world, and the world is finally one—*our world*—and can only be as legitimate as the process that willed it into being (Barber 2003, 200-201: italic is added and other emphases in original).

Here, the key word is "our world."[11] What Barber (and Rousseau) try to argue is that our-world to which the general will is directed has nothing to do with the suppression of individual wills (and interests), but is the political product of collective will-formation. The most critical problem of traditional liberal democratic theory is that it does not take into account the possibility of self-transformation in democratic will-formation processes (Warren 1992). It claims that man is an inherently private individual, man's preference is fixed, man's natural right is absolute, and therefore the primary role of politics is to secure self-preservation by denying (anarchist democracy), or suppressing (realistic democracy), or tolerating (minimalist democracy) the conflict among self-seeking individuals (Barber 2003, 3-20). But it can hardly come to terms with transforming the conflict. Democratic theories of self-transformation emphasize that the self as a willing agent can transform itself from a private individual to a public citizen by creating a public forum (or our world) in civil society. So by transforming the conflict, these theories mean to transform the self "temporarily" in order to resolve the incumbent common problems. In that self-transformation is temporal (hence, political), it is a far cry from spiritual self-transformation.

Is the Korean *uri* tantamount to the Rousseauian general will? Yes and no. No, if *uri* is meant by the psycho-cultural *uri* because the overlapping of egos is qualitatively different from the creation of

11. As one referee has pointed out, "our world" can be construed as an "actionable world" in the Arendtian sense. My reservation in direct reference to Arendt, though, is because, in her political theory, concepts like "the public" and "action" are featured in stark contradistinction to "the private" and ordinary interpersonal activities so that they may not be able to come to terms with Korean "lay" people's *jeong* relations. Nevertheless, I can agree that, as far as participatory political actions—aside from the strong (male-centered) heroism saturating Arendt's key concepts—are concerned, the idea of an actionable world can bear great relevance to Korean *uri*-responsibility.

common interest out of conflicting individual interests. In fact, the general will as the common interest can be susceptible to a sort of free-rider problem, as Rousseau himself acknowledges when he observes:

> For every individual as a man may have a private will contrary to, or different from, the general will that he has as a citizen. His private interest may speak with a very different voice from that of the public interest; his absolute and naturally independent existence may make him regard what he owes to the common cause as a gratuitous contribution, the loss of which would be less painful for others than the payment is onerous for him; and fancying that the artificial person which constitutes the state is a mere rational entity (since it is not a man), *he might seek to enjoy the rights of a citizen without doing the duties of a subject* (Rousseau 1968, 63-64: emphasis added).

In contrast, *uri*-responsibility as a moral commitment to "doing one's own share" and/or to "fulfilling/shouldering one's own burden" has little to do with an exercise of "interest" vis-à-vis "a mere rational entity." Instead, *uri*-responsibility that is exercised through palpable *jeong* is rooted in one's sense of shame, a shame that his or her indifference to reality would have helped injustice and/or moral corruption, or, at least, it would be "somewhat" related with the status quo.[12]

But if our focus is placed not on common interest but on collectively-shared responsibility, if it is admitted that political problems include moral issues as well as material questions,[13] and if it is persuaded that private individuals can build citizenship not only by transforming the conflict, but also by creating shared responsibility,[14]

12. One referee has pointed out the connection between *uri*-responsibility and a sense of shame. I appreciate his or her comment on this point.
13. Or, it can be argued that political problems are at once moral and material because the two cannot be clearly separated in reality.
14. But the two ways of self-transformation are not mutually exclusive. Rather they are complementary in the actual political situation.

the Korean *uri*—in this case, the political *uri*—can be construed as a uniquely Korean mode of general will. In short, in Korea, collective will-formation can be directed at the creation of *uri*-responsibility. It is especially so in a society like Korea in which almost every political issue is entangled in the question of moral justification unlike in Western societies wherein the separation between morality and politics has been firmly established at least on a public rhetorical revel. Our final question then is what exactly *uri*-responsibility is.

Uri-Responsibility

As we have seen in the core cases above, the defining characteristic of *uri*-responsibility is the responsibility that otherwise private individuals, by forming a group (*uri*), are willing to assume for the (moral and material) political predicaments that they as individuals have not created. To compare it with the Kantian-liberal account(s) of responsibility, on the one hand, and with what Karl Jaspers defines as metaphysical responsibility, on the other, is helpful in understanding its uniqueness.

In the Kantian-liberal tradition, there are two types of responsibility. The first is a "moral" (or on the other side of the same coin, "criminal") responsibility. It is a moral sense only a free agent can possess because she alone is able to be responsible for the result her action has brought about, the action that was freely chosen. Alternately, therefore, we can call it a "causal" responsibility. We have seen in all three cases (especially, cases 1 and 2) how *uri*-responsibility defies causal reasoning. Whereas a Kantian moral responsibility approaches a personal moral/criminal issue as the agentic question of an individual's volition and/or intention, *uri*-responsibility refuses to attribute the question of morality exclusively to the individual (or the criminal) and instead seeks collectively to resolve the moral problems while still holding him or her responsible for his or her own action only if he or she deserves *jeong* (see case 2).

The second Kantian responsibility is "political" responsibility. Political responsibility is a responsibility to which a political commu-

nity (normally, the state) will be held for any political injustice (e.g., unjust war or international crimes) it has done to people outside its territory. Hannah Arendt (2003, 150-151) calls it "collective responsibility" vis-à-vis the moral responsibility. The best example is the collective responsibility the entire German nation had to take for WWII. Implicit in the notion of political responsibility as the only mode of collective responsibility is that the only legitimate actor in international relations is the nation-state, as the only and the most important actor within the state is the individual in the classic Kantian-liberal political tradition. Admittedly, it is enmeshed with the international political paradigm of the balance of power(s) among equally sovereign nation-states.

Apparently, either type of the Kantian-liberal responsibility can hardly come to grips with *uri*-responsibility because it is neither an individual's moral/criminal responsibility nor overtly state-centered political/collective responsibility. *Uri*-responsibility is rather "collective moral responsibility" in that it is a collectively shared responsibility in civil society, on the one hand, and, nevertheless, it is still moral responsibility on the other because, in a contemporary democracy, civil society is separated from the state apparatus. Civil society is rather a public realm that mediates between the private sphere and the state.

Apparently, *uri*-responsibility seems to have more to do with "metaphysical guilt," about which Karl Jaspers writes:

> There exists a solidarity among men as human beings that makes each co-responsible for every wrong and every injustice in the world, especially for crimes committed in his presence or with his knowledge. If I fail to do whatever I can to prevent them, I too am guilty (Jaspers 2000, 26).

The attraction metaphysical guilt/responsibility has to the understanding of *uri*-responsibility is twofold. First, it certainly comes to terms with the special sense of responsibility one feels for the incident with which he or she, as an individual, neither legally nor morally, is personally responsible (in the Kantian meaning). And, second, it presents a special mode of collective responsibility distinguished from political responsibility.

Nevertheless, *uri*-responsibility in Korean civil society is not to be confused with metaphysical responsibility, the responsibility that is universally felt by all rational human beings. *Uri*-responsibility does not transcend specific cultural, social, and political contexts in the way Jaspers' metaphysical responsibility does. Rather, *uri*-responsibility is a culture-sensitive and historically contextualized moral sensibility. It is not what you as a rational individual are forced to feel because you find yourself helpless when you could do nothing for the injustice or crime done to innocent others. *Uri*-responsibility that we have explored here is a felt-sense that you *as a Korean* cannot but confront, who understands the historicity of one's national self, the *uri*-self: her sorrow, her humiliation, her suffering as well as her joy, her glory, and her hope. Again, integral to *uri*-responsibility is *jeong* (particularly, *miun jeong*), and metaphysical responsibility is completely strange to Korean *jeong*ish relationality.

The Centrality of Ethical Civil Society

But, one may wonder, is not civil society a contractual *Gesellschaft* in the service of interests as opposed to the *Gemeinschaft* of a shared, thick or full morality? And, correspondingly, isn't the emphasis on *uri*-responsibility, however "politically" reinterpreted and reconstructed, still predicated on a pre-political, psycho-cultural *uri* identity nourished on jeongish relationality? Strong as they are, however, these skepticisms about the wedding between *jeong*-induced *uri*-responsibility and modern civil society are misguided because the conventional belief that modernity is possible only when tradition is overcome and when *Gemeinschaft* is superseded by *Gesellschaft* is itself far from the original ideal of civil society presented by theorists like Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith, Alexis de Tocqueville, and G. W. F. Hegel. In fact, as Kim Sung-Ho (2004) has argued, the classic vision of civil society can be better understood as locked between

a complete resignation to, and a reactionary indignation against, modernity.[15]

In the same vein, the myth that civil society is equated with market relations must be discarded (see Duncan 2002). Let alone the new leftist and left Hegelian account of civil society as fundamentally opposed to economics (Cohen and Arato 1992; Keane 2000), even for its most liberal proponents like John Locke, growing commercial forces were deemed to be a colossal threat to "civil" life (Hall 1995). What Locke and later his epigones were grappling with was how to come up with a great alchemy that could strike a middle ground between the ethical life (classical virtue) and the massively secularizing commercial environment that had become an indispensable part of modernity (Seligman 1992). "Civil society" was such a complex and dialectical middle ground in which, not classical virtues that had become too noble to be fit in modernity, but "civilities" that, by taking advantage of man's desire for reputation, could help to transform the otherwise independent, narcissistic, private, and, therefore, unsociable individual into the interdependent, public, and, hence, sociable citizen (Tarcov 1998). As such, civil society was essentially a necessitous social arrangement to cope with the collapse of the classical world in the face of the rise of commercial republics, and, in that it *only* attempted at self-transformation rather than stringent self-control, by interlocking self-loving desires to sociable citizenship, it was profoundly a mixed middle ground between private and public (Seligman 2000).

That civil society in its ideal was a complex middle way between *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft* and between private and public provides an important insight into the essentially ethical nature of civil society. In short, civil society is ethical society (see Markus 2001). Equally important, civil society as a public sphere mediating between the private sphere and the state is a social practice rather than a fixed or reified social entity like state apparatuses, which can and should be culturally rearticulated, reformulated, and even reinvented (Hann

15. For more about this point, see Cahoone (2002) and Shils (1997).

1996; Vashney 2001). The ethical project of the cultural reinvention of civil society is especially critical to non-Western societies like South Korea that, despite massive capitalization and the relatively firm institutionalization of democracy on the system level, the corresponding ethical civil society has yet to be articulated. As John Dewey (1954) was convinced, if democracy is not the political regime *per se*, but is, in its most profound sense, a "way of life," and, accordingly, if what is central to democratic living is citizenship, not just voting, the centrality of civil society to democracy is self-evident, for it defines the nature and the quality of citizenship. It is for this reason that Koreans should take pains to maintain and further ameliorate their own ethical civil society that is politically practicable and culturally relevant, instead of hastily replacing it with interest-based civil societies as the liberal-pluralist account of civil society dictates. In this respect, the value of the cultural practice of *jeong* and *uri*-responsibility in Korean society for its democratic empowerment is simply immense.

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