

Intersectionality with a Korean Philosopher

An interview with Jin Y. Park

Professor Park - Many thanks for your time and for agreeing to conduct this interview.

Firstly, I am curious as to how you first became interested in Korean Philosophy – did this happen before you went to do further study in the United States? Had you studied Western philosophy first?

And how did they initially intersect?

My interest in Korean philosophy developed rather gradually. I think that this also had to do with the academic curriculum itself at the time. When I was in college, “philosophy” usually meant—and perhaps still means—Western philosophy: Plato, Aristotle, Augustin, Descartes, Kant, Hegel etc. This line of Western thinkers was what we studied.

The university where I completed my undergraduate studies offered only one or two courses on Confucianism; that was all I could learn about what we call “Asian” philosophy. The Confucian classics and materials related to a bit of Korean Neo-Confucianism were all there in the college curriculum about Korean philosophy.

At school, I read typical Western philosophy, which did not attract me. At a certain point, I thought that I should give up philosophy, since I didn’t feel comfortable with those Western thinkers I studied. I don’t know how much I was simply putting up with them as an undergraduate, but I do remember that I didn’t feel that their philosophies were very relevant to me or to my concerns.

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There were a few Western philosophy books, however, with which I was fascinated. They were works by existential philosophers, including Nietzsche, Sartre, Camus, and Kierkegaard. These thinkers were not taught at school at the time, so I read them by myself. There was also no class on Buddhism at my university in that era. I must have read quite a bit of Buddhist texts by myself, since, when I first read Jacques Derrida, I was able to connect him with Buddhism.

My relationship with philosophy reached a turning point when I was introduced to postmodern thinkers during my graduate studies in the U.S. When we read Derrida's first book *Of Grammatology* (1967) in a course titled "Postmodernism and Deconstruction," most of my classmates were in a panic, complaining that they had no idea what was going on in the text. To me, what Derrida argues in that book was exactly like Buddhism. That was the first time that I thought I would like to work on the intersections between Derrida and Buddhism. The fact that a twentieth-century French philosopher and Buddhism had a similar vision about the world and being was simply fascinating to me. I wanted to study more of Derrida and postmodern philosophy and Buddhism, so that was what I did in my doctoral studies.

My mentor with whom I studied Korean Buddhism was a well-known scholar on Korean Sŏn 禪 Buddhism. I read Chinul's (1158–1210) works with him and learned about various topics related to Korean Buddhist philosophy, including enlightenment, sudden practice, and sudden awakening, Kanhwa Sŏn 看話禪.

I wrote my doctoral dissertation on Buddhism and postmodern thought, more specifically on Sŏn and Huayan/Hwaŏm Buddhism and French postmodern philosophy; in doing so, I criticized modernity and advocated for postmodern diversity. The combination was a bit off-balance, since I was comparing pre-modern Korean Buddhist philosophy with 20th-century Western philosophy. After I finished my doctoral dissertation, I was very much aware of the problems inherent in this comparison. I asked myself: Does Buddhism today actually have the capacity to deal with the issues that I assigned to Buddhism with my study of its pre-modern iterations?

With these questions, I began my research on modern Korean Buddhism, which eventually led to the publication of my edited volume *Makers of Modern Korean Buddhism* (2010). In the process of studying modern Korean Buddhism, I discovered a female thinker and Buddhist nun Kim Iryŏp (1896–1971), about whom I did extensive research. I translated one of her books, which was published as *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun* (2014), and I also wrote a book about her life and philosophy called *Women and Buddhist Philosophy* (2017).

Even though I was trained in premodern Korean Buddhism, my interest has always been to think about Buddhism in the context of current issues. I wanted to think about what kind of vision Buddhism can offer us regarding the issues we are facing today, including those surrounding gender, justice, discrimination, and violence. It was natural for me to start research on modern Korean Buddhism after my doctoral studies. In that context, I began research on modern Korean philosophy.

As you know, the expressions "philosophy" and "religion" appeared only during the mid-nineteenth century in East Asia. As I discussed in my articles "Philosophizing and Power" and "Burdens of Modernity," the transition from the pre-modern to the modern in the context of the intellectual history in East Asia did not occur smoothly. Instead, there was a seeming rupture in its surface structure and a transformation at the level of its deep structure. Korea was no exception. The first generation of modern Korean

philosophers seemed to continuously struggle between the modern, meaning Western philosophical traditions, and the traditional, meaning Buddhism, Confucianism, and so on.

Such a struggle is very visible in the work of modern Korean Buddhist thinkers like Kim Iryöp and Paek Sönguk (1896-1981). Iryöp's awareness of gender issues is a result of the modern education, and she found her response in Buddhism, i.e., in Asian tradition. Paek studied both Buddhist and Western philosophy and was well aware of the philosophical differences between traditional Korean (Buddhist) and Western philosophy. I examined that in the abovementioned publications. However, this phenomenon is also visible in scholars who were trained solely in Western philosophy like Pak Ch'iu (1909-1949) or Pak Chonghong (1903-1976), two of the most important thinkers in modern Korean philosophy. Like the Kyoto School thinkers in modern Japan, the Korean thinkers in the modern period were doing cross-cultural philosophy whether they were aware of it or not.

This is a rather long answer to your question, but I think asking questions about how one became interested in non-Western philosophy tells much about the status of our philosophy education and the state of affairs in academic philosophy.

What are some of main challenges of 'doing' Korean Philosophy in such a globalised age where scholars must produce work in English and explain 'Korean' philosophy in English?

I think that there are layers of challenges in doing Korean philosophy in particular and non-Western philosophy in general in the English-speaking world.

A perennial problem of doing non-Western philosophy in the English-speaking world is the lack of materials in English. In order for a certain philosophy to be discussed and examined, we need to read primary texts. In order for that to happen in the English-speaking world, Korean philosophy texts need to be translated into English.

However, as we know too well, translation is not a simple act of rendering a text from one language into another. In order to translate a philosophical text, we need experts who have deep knowledge and understanding of the philosopher and the text. However, those who are experts of Korean philosophy are mostly trained in Korea and Korean, not in the English-speaking world.

In addition, most of us who were trained in English have almost never learned about Korean philosophy, other than, say, a bit of pre-modern Confucianism and Buddhism, in a school setting. Confucianism and Buddhism are important parts of Korean philosophy, but Korean philosophy is more than that. Not having had the opportunity to properly learn Korean philosophy in either college or graduate school, those of us who do Korean philosophy in the English-speaking world struggle to find extra time to self-educate on Korean philosophy.

Ultimately, this creates a vicious circle: A lack of English translation of the primary text and a lack of any secondary material on Korean philosophy results in the absence of a scholarly community doing Korean philosophy.

In this situation, the existence of the North American Korean Philosophy Association (NAKPA) has been a great venue for scholars to get together and explore Korean philosophy. In particular, it's wonderful to see young scholars and even graduate students get engaged with Korean philosophy at the annual meetings of the NAKPA. I

thank you, Kevin, and University College Cork, for hosting an excellent annual conference this year (2019). And thanks for your generous hospitality! Next year (2020), the annual conference will be held in Korea at Sogang University.

You have done a great amount of work on Buddhism – why have you been so interested in ‘Buddhist philosophy’? What makes Korean Buddhist philosophy distinctive, especially if we think of scholars such as Wŏnhyo and Chinul?

I cannot name just one reason why I am specialized in a certain philosophy, say, why I became a Buddhist philosopher instead of a Confucian scholar or a Kantian one. But one thing that attracted me to Buddhism, I think, was that Buddhism is one of the humblest philosophies I know. What Buddhism essentially tells me is: “Look at yourself. You suffer. You struggle to figure out what this life is all about. You know why you suffer? Because...”

Buddhist philosophy is sophisticated and complex. However, the complex philosophical systems of Buddhism are aimed at explaining this simple fact of why we suffer and investigating how we can figure out the meaning of our existence.

Wŏnhyo (617-686) is perhaps the most well-known figure in Korean Buddhism, and he left behind a very complex Buddhist philosophy. But, one of my favorite texts by Wŏnhyo is a small piece titled “Awaken Your Mind and Practice” (發心修行章, *Palsim suhaeng jang*). As you know too well, this is a very short verse-format piece in which Wŏnhyo admonishes people to be aware of human existential reality. We all die, we all try to find meaning in our existence, but without seriously getting to that, we are deceiving ourselves without fully living this life in an authentic manner. He asks: And what would be the meaning of our existence in that case? It is said that Wŏnhyo in his later years travelled from village by village wearing a mask to sing this poem to the people. Regardless of the historical truth of this story, imagine a renowned Buddhist master in his old age behaving like a clown in his appearance, but urging people to figure out the real meaning of their existence. I think this existential dimension of Buddhism has not been emphasized enough in our approach to Buddhism. I address this issue in my recent publication, “Kyŏnghŏ Songu (1849–1912) and the Existential Dimensions of Modern Korean Buddhism.”

I studied Chinul (1158-1210) as one of my main focuses during my doctoral studies, since I wanted to study Sŏn (“Zen” in Japanese, “Chan” in Chinese) Buddhism, and Chinul is the founder of Korean Sŏn Buddhism. The Kanhwa Sŏn tradition that he introduced to Korean Buddhism in the 13th century is still considered a dominant form of Korean Sŏn Buddhism.

I was especially fascinated by the Kanhwa Sŏn tradition, which is a part of Chan Buddhism’s gong’an 公案, or “encounter dialogue,” tradition. In an encounter dialogue, a student practitioner asks a Chan master a question, to which the student will receive a seemingly nonsensical answer. The student will struggle to make sense of the master’s answer, and a successful struggle should lead the student to awakening. My professor translated this encounter dialogue as a “questioning meditation.” As the student struggles to figure out the meaning of the answer given by the master, the student’s inquiry about the meaning of the answer guides him to examine the meaning of his own action of finding meaning. The internal movement of the inquiry facilitates the student’s existential awakening to the meaning of his existence. The French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty had a similar idea when he proposed

“interrogation” as an important philosophical mode, as I discussed in my co-edited volume *Merleau-Ponty and Buddhism*.

One of the points of this practice is to get the practitioner to become aware of our fixed mode of thinking. We each live in a box that we created or were told to create, and we fail to see a broader picture. When this practice of “building the wall” does not receive our critical attention, we fail to communicate and understand those people who have a different “box” or who seem to be outside of our walls. The walls, the boxes we created, have multi-layered meanings, ranging from an individual’s relationship with the self and others to a society’s way of dealing with marginalized groups or marginalized regions and people in the global community. I examined some of these topics in my book *Buddhism and Postmodernity* (2008).

What are some of the biggest similarities you see with ‘Western’ philosophy?

I would say that the fundamental position of modern Continental philosophy is almost opposite to what Buddhism tries to teach, whereas as we move on to postmodern thought, we clearly see similar modes of thinking between the two traditions. Among the postmodern thinkers, I believe that Jacques Derrida’s philosophy is most compatible with Buddhism, as can be seen in Robert Magliola’s *Derrida on the Mend* (1983), David Loy’s *Healing Deconstruction* (1996), and my own edited volume *Buddhisms and Deconstructions* (2006). The later philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty also shows a similar approach to Buddhism, which was the topic of my aforementioned co-edited volume, *Merleau-Ponty and Buddhism* (2010). I haven’t worked on Nietzsche, but there are at least three books that deal with Nietzsche and Buddhism. There is also a book on *Levinas and Asian Thought* (2013).

A key teaching of Buddhism is interconnectedness. In the Buddhist world, no being has a permanent and independent essence. Things exist through a complex web of connection. I don’t want to overgeneralize, but I do think it’s fair to say that, in Western philosophy, an independent identity for a being is essential to understanding the world. That is especially the case in modern Continental philosophy. With the Cartesian declaration of “I think, therefore I am,” the self as an independent thinking being is at the core of one’s epistemological endeavour. The subject-object dualism functions as a basic structure in our epistemology and even our value judgment.

At the end of the nineteenth century at least, European thinkers began to see the problem of this clear dualistic vision of the world and the certitude of the self’s role as the constructor of our understanding. Rationality and objectivity, which were previously positioned as the guarantors for the self’s unfailing judgement, began to receive criticism. Freud’s findings about unconsciousness and Nietzsche’s challenge to the givenness of our value systems gradually opened the door to a philosophy that more rigorously examines the idea of difference rather than homogeneity and relationality in lieu of identity.

Two of the fundamental concepts in Derrida’s philosophy are “différance” and “trace.” Contrary to the idea of the independent identity of self, Derrida claims that concepts/ideas are possible because of their difference from others; in a concept, other concepts exist as trace. For example, in the idea of presence, absence is there as trace; if there is no absence, presence cannot make sense either. The two extremes of binary opposites are always already interconnected. We can clearly see that Derrida’s ideas can be connected with the Buddhist teaching of dependent co-arising.

And following on from that, what are some of the biggest differences?

I would say that the two most visible differences between modern Western philosophy and traditional East Asian philosophy are: (1) the concept of the self; and (2) logic.

Modern Western philosophy is based on the concept of the independent and autonomous self, with rationality as the essence of that being.

Traditional East Asian philosophy sees the world through relational identity. Buddhism and Confucianism are two very different philosophies, but if we compare them with modern Western philosophy, we can see that both Confucianism and Buddhism view the world through the lenses of relational networks. In this case, the self is understood through its relation to others, in which the subject and object are inevitably interconnected.

This idea of the relational identity also has influence on the ways in which logic functions in the Eastern and Western philosophical traditions.

The foundational logic of Western philosophy is the Aristotelian logic of the principles of identity, contradiction, and the excluded middle. For example, a rose is a rose; a rose cannot be a non-rose; and between the rose and the non-rose, there cannot be any overlapping space. This is usually how we think, I suppose.

Buddhist logic at first sounds somewhat counterintuitive and visibly violates the Aristotelian logic. What is known as the four-cornered logic in Buddhism is a good example. For a comparative purpose, let me use the same example I used above. Buddhist logic goes: (1) a rose is a rose (which is clear); (2) a rose is not a rose (which is counter-intuitive, but if we think about how a rose exists, we see that a rose exists because there is water, soil, sunshine, air, and so on. There is no rose-ness as an unchanging essence; hence, a rose is not a rose. Rather, “rose” is a linguistic signifier); (3) a rose is then both a rose (as we can distinguish a rose from a tulip, for example) and not-a-rose (since a rose as an essence does not exist); (4) a rose is neither a rose nor not-a-rose (this is the stage that negates step 3, since otherwise, we will again reify the rose of step 3).

Buddhist logic might sound illogical, but as I tried to explain above in a simple form, the seeming illogic of Buddhism has its own logic, which I call the logic of illogic. My article “Zen and Zen Philosophy of Language” discussed this issue.

The different forms of logic have far-reaching impacts on our thinking, including our social, political, and ethical evaluations.

The modern Korean Buddhist philosopher Paek Sönguk (1897-1981) discusses this issue in his article “Buddhist Pure Philosophy (*Pulgyo suncho ch’örhak*, 1925).” As a first-generation Korean philosopher who studied both Buddhist and Western philosophy, Paek was clearly aware of the visibly different approaches to logic between the Western and Buddhist philosophies. As such, he demonstrates how Buddhist logic explains the ideas of freedom and equality.

As a woman, who is also Asian, hence marginalised on many fronts, what are the biggest challenges you have faced as a philosopher in your own right? How have you overcome these challenges?

One of the biggest challenges of being a female Asian philosopher who is working on Asian philosophy is getting my voice heard. I constantly struggle to establish

legitimacy while pursuing philosophy the way I want to instead of conforming to the style of philosophy that I believe has been accepted as the standard.

I am an Asian woman whose expertise is in non-Western philosophy, especially in Korean philosophy. This is a marginal position four times over.

Philosophy has been one of the most male-dominated fields in the humanities. In the United States, a bit less than 20% of full-time faculty in philosophy are women. However, the percentage of Asian women and Pacific Islanders in the entire U.S. higher education system at the rank of full professor is only 3%; chances are, the percentage of Asian women in philosophy is much lower.

I feel that at each step of my career, I've had to justify why what I do is a "philosophy" and is worth attention. When I studied Chinul's Sŏn Buddhism, I had to prove why Buddhism, especially Sŏn Buddhism, is a philosophy; I had to do so in an academia that claims non-Western traditions do not have philosophy.

I don't know whether marginal positions—whether gender, ethnicity, or topics of philosophy—can be overcome. Rather, I've made marginality itself an important philosophical topic, and I've tried to create a space in which I can raise my voice and make my marginal position more visible. Whether or not those who are at the centre accept this alternate space, I believe that if it has the legitimacy and value I believe it does, it will be populated by those whose ideas are similar to mine and those who will show the limits of what is at the centre and expand the boundary of philosophy. Such results and practices will give further value to this alternate space and enrich our understanding of existence.

In order to make my claim of the legitimacy of Buddhism as philosophy visible, a colleague and I created the International Society for Buddhist Philosophy (ISBP) in 2002. I served as the founding director until 2018. The ISBP came to be affiliated with the American Philosophical Association and annually hosts two panels in three of its division meetings. These panels have been the space where those of us who do Buddhist philosophy can present our ideas when the "main program" of the American Philosophical Association is filled with Western philosophy.

In order to claim that the philosophy in a woman's life and thoughts is as legitimate as any big names in the history of philosophy, I published a book, *Women and Buddhist Philosophy*, and provided my reasoning about how Kim Iryŏp's writings offer us an example of a woman's philosophy. As I mentioned in the book, women and Buddhist philosophy reveal a double minority position, women as a minority in the context of gender and Buddhists as a minority in the context of philosophical tradition. The former is called gender discrimination, and I termed the latter philosophical discrimination.

Legitimacy is closely related to the power dynamics of the time. The burden of proof that I—and anyone who is approaching marginalized philosophy—have to deal with in establishing the validity of my philosophy is not an easy task. However, I believe that changes are occurring—very slowly but constantly ongoing. I see more female philosophers now than I did ten or twenty years ago, which is a good sign.

Just out of curiosity, who is your favourite Korean philosopher? Why?

In the context of women and Buddhist philosophy, I would say that Kim Iryŏp (1896–1971) has had most influence on my Buddhist philosophy, although my training in Buddhism was with premodern thinkers such as Wŏnhyo and Chinul. While working

on Kim Iryöp's life and philosophy, I was able to envision a form of women's philosophy, and also a form of women's Buddhist philosophy.

Outside of Buddhist tradition, Pak Ch'iu is another thinker to whom I frequently refer in my discussion of modern Korean philosophy during recent years. He was the first generation of Korean thinker who studied Western philosophy, and as far as I know, he did not have any education on traditional Korean philosophy such as Confucianism or Buddhism. We still find the Asian mode of thinking in him via his criticism of Western modernist logic.

Could you outline the ideas of one or two modern Korean philosophers (20th century etc) that you think would be interesting for Westerners who generally are unaware of Korean philosophy in general? How did Korea's historical context shape their ideas/identities?

I will briefly talk about the two thinkers I mentioned above.

I will begin with Kim Iryöp (金一葉, 1896-1971). Kim is her family name, and Iryöp is her pen name and later dharma name. So, I will call her Iryöp, as is the convention in Korean.

Iryöp was born in the northern part of Korea in 1896, as a daughter of Christian parents. With the influence of her pastor father, Iryöp grew up as a faithful Christian, envisioning her future as a Christian missionary. During her teenage years, however, questions on Christian doctrines eventually led her to lose faith in that religion.

As I discussed in my article "Gendered Modernity: Kim Iryeop and Buddhism" (here, Iryöp's name is Romanized following the Ministry of Culture system), Iryöp's life in many ways reflects the historical context of Korea at the time.

Iryöp was one of the Korean women known as the new women (*sinyöja*). They were the first generation of Korean women who received a newly introduced Western style of public education for women and who were also keen to change women's position in a patriarchal society. Iryöp was educated at Ehwa Hakdang (1913–1918), the first Western-style institution for the higher education of women in Korea. She furthered her education in Japan from 1919 to 1920

Iryöp was an active member of the women's movement and seemed to have thought that women could attain equality and freedom by changing social norms. Her social activist position gradually gave way to a religious worldview as Iryöp saw the limits of social change and became attracted to Buddhism.

During her late twenties, Iryöp began to study Buddhist doctrines and practice meditation, and she eventually joined the monastery in 1933. Iryöp was in her late thirties. She was a leading figure in the Buddhist nuns' community until her death in 1971.

Some scholars claim that there was a rupture in Iryöp's life, dividing it into two periods of before and after her joining the monastery. According to such an interpretation of her life, before joining the monastery, Iryöp was a social activist who demanded sexual freedom for women, whereas after joining the monastery, she was a celibate Buddhist nun. I have claimed that despite the radical difference on the surface of Iryöp's lifestyle in these two periods, the same spirit, which I identified as a search for freedom, ran throughout her existence.

As a new woman, Iryöp tried to change social norms and gendered understanding of women in order to free them from the patriarchal practices in her society. After Iryöp became a Buddhist nun, her pursuit of freedom moved deeper, examining the human existential condition and searching for absolute freedom. Buddhist teaching in this context played a pivotal role in her search.

The Buddhist concept of self is known as no-self. Drawing from the idea of no-self, Iryöp claimed that the everyday self, which we assume as distinctively our own and clearly separated from others, in fact shows only a part of story about our identity. Iryöp called this idea of separate and closed self a “small-I” (so’a 小我). Once we realize that our existence is not possible without other contributors, we begin to see the self not as a closed concept but as an open identity. Iryöp called this self with open identity a “big-I” (tae’a 大我). The openness of a being, explained through the Buddhist worldview, enabled Iryöp to find the basis of freedom to liberate her from the gendered identity.

Iryöp’s Buddhism was her way of dealing with women’s issues at multiple levels. She proposed that the Buddhist vision of big-I, or the great-self, is the primal task that women need to accomplish in order to liberate themselves from gendered identity. From Iryöp’s perspective, the search for the self through inner transformation is the first step for women’s liberation.

Iryöp’s writings are also her testimony about women’s lives. By telling stories about the lives of her female friends, Iryöp made women’s lives visible. Her narratives are the witnesses to her life and the lives of other women; the stories were Iryöp’s way of engaging with women’s issues. In this sense, I characterized Iryöp’s philosophy as a narrative philosophy.

As in the case of Kim Iryöp, we notice a Korean context for Pak Ch’iu (1909-1949): he was one of the first generation of Korean thinkers who studied “philosophy” as a discipline introduced to Korea as part of the influx of Western culture in the process of modernization. Another aspect of Korean context for Pak Ch’iu is a political situation in Korea. Pak was a socialist thinker who during the last years of his life moved to North Korea and came back to South Korea as a communist guerrilla. He was killed by the South Korean army during guerrilla warfare in the mountains.

There was almost no study of Kim Iryöp’s philosophy until the late 1990s or 2000s because she was a new woman, whom Korean society condemned as an unruly woman, and a Buddhist nun in a patriarchal society. (What little research on Kim Iryöp existing before that period was focused on her literary works). There was almost no study of Pak Ch’iu until the late 2000s and early 2010s because he was a socialist who moved to North Korea. Both cases clearly demonstrate that our scholarship and philosophy are strongly controlled by the power dynamics and ideology of our society, instead of being neutral and objective endeavours.

In an essay titled “Walking away from an academic philosophy (*Ak’ademi ch’orhak ūl naomyō*, 1936),” Pak states that he majored in philosophy in order to learn “what is philosophy?” However, all he learned as a philosophy major was “what philosophy was about” and thus wasted his time.

Pak states that our concern for philosophy should focus on “today, here, for us, what philosophy should be.” For Pak, philosophy cannot and should not be mere theories or ideas; its domain is in praxis and should offer critical views on the status quo of the time.

Pak's call to bridge the gap between theoretical philosophy and social practice informs us about his position on liberation. In his discussion of the emergence of individualism in "civil society" in the West, Pak pays attention to the limits of the promise of civil society. That is, civil society is premised on freedom and equality for individual citizens, but freedom and equality of civil society did not apply to all the members of the society and created another form of power hierarchy. Only the bourgeoisie enjoyed the privilege of citizenship and thus freedom and equality.

Interestingly, Pak analyses the problem of civil society and its failure to secure freedom and equality for all as the limitation of formal logic. Pak argues that in the emergence of civil society in which citizens—bourgeoisie—challenged the power of aristocrats, the bourgeoisie needed the idea that everyone is free and equal: one is just one, whether the one is a citizen or an aristocrat. However, attaining freedom and equality of the citizen created another layer of power structure, because this freedom and equality did not apply to those who were not "citizens"—that is, labourers, factory workers, and women. Pak thus argues that the logic of the identity that one is one works only as an abstract concept; when it is applied to reality, it cannot function.

In the formal logic, one plus one makes two, but in the pre-modern aristocratic society, an aristocrat's one and a servant's one were not equal. In modern civil society, a bourgeoisie's one and a factory worker's one are not equal either. Pak argues that unless one understands the logic that one is already connected with many, which is in fact a Buddhist logic, freedom and equality for all are not possible.

Pak's philosophy enabled me to consider Buddhist political philosophy as an alternative to modern Western philosophy—even though, as far as I know, Pak never studied Buddhism. But after all, he was a Korean philosopher and must have breathed Buddhism in the air of Korea.

And finally, if you could explain to us briefly, what does it mean 'to do' Korean philosophy in English?

I think that there are differences between doing Korean philosophy in English in the English-speaking world and doing and publishing Korean philosophy in Korean.

When doing Korean philosophy in English, we need to see this act of philosophy in the broader context of the understanding and position of "non-Western" philosophy in Western academia.

In recent years, there have been challenges to the West-centrism in philosophy academia in the West. Those of us who are working on non-Western philosophy have made it clear that the exclusionist tendency of Western philosophy academia cannot be justified in the name of philosophy and have demanded more global approaches to philosophy, both for scholars and for our students.

I think that doing Korean philosophy in the English-speaking world is itself a way to challenge the Western dominance in our thinking and a way to challenge what we call cultural imperialism. In this context, intersectionality—which tells us synergy of different social categories in the suppression of specific groups, be they gender, ethnicity, region, or sexual orientation—is an important concept to consider in order to demonstrate Korean philosophy's relevance to our time.