

Exploring the Complexity of “Korean” Lives Beyond National History: Recent English-Language Studies of the Korean Colonial Experience, 1999~2019: A Brief Examination

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Abstract

This essay examines the historiography of English language scholarship of the past two decades (1999~2019) on Korean studies of the colonial period (1910~1945) published in the US. With the diversification of scholarly agents and increasing interest in “Korea” itself in the field in recent decades, English-language scholarship has increasingly problematized the heuristic categories of “colonial modernity,” “collaboration” and “national history” that have long permeated studies of Korean history in earlier generations and within Korea-based scholarship. Beginning with a re-examination of early canonical works including Carter J. Eckert’s *Offspring of Empire* (1992) and Michael Robinson and Shin Gi-Wook’s *Colonial Modernity in Korea* (1999) along with their common critiques, I discuss how some subsequent English-language studies of the colonial period have attempted to provide a critical examination of such categorizations, while remaining by and large within the existing tropes of their generation. I argue that more recent scholarship has been moving towards three main trends that will continue to inform students and scholars of the field in the future: *differentiation*, which questions and deconstructs readily assumed notions of “nation”, “people” and ethnicity, *uncovering antinomies*, which accepts self-contradictions within existing categorizations that have been assumed to be mutually exclusive (such as “collaboration” and “nationalism”), and *transnational scope*, which recognizes the history of colonialism as transcending national boundaries.

[Key Words] Korean studies, colonial period (1910~1945), colonial modernity, collaboration, national history, imperialism, *minjok*, identity, differentiation, uncovering antinomies, transnational scope

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I. Introduction

This essay cursorily examines the historiography of English-language Korean studies, published in the US in the last two decades (1999~2019), with a focus on the study of colonial period (1910~1945). It is not intended as a comprehensive overview of the English-language studies on the colonial period Korean history. The space and time constraints confine the subject of this examination to, first, book-length monographs, excluding most of the articles, chapters from collected volumes, MA and Ph. D dissertations, conference papers and other academic output, and second, those works that I have rather subjectively, but hopefully not arbitrarily, set aside as worthy of discussion. The works discussed below are the ones that I feel are indicative of the broader trends in the US affecting Korean studies, especially the field of modern Korean history, in the span of the two decades. I have paid a particular attention to those works that problematize the existing heuristic categories of understanding the Korean colonial experience, such as “colonial modernity,” “collaboration,” and “national history.” However, it should be made clear at the outset that this essay does not deeply engage with such theoretical issues as, for instance, postcolonialism, the subaltern subject, social constructivism or feminism, even though some of these theoretical concerns are going to be touched upon as we explore the monographs below.

To start out with a rather sweeping statement, perhaps the biggest change in the last twenty years in English-language studies of modern Korean history is deconstruction of national histories, including the very epistemological category of “Korean history.” In other words, we are entering the phase of historical scholarship in which Korean history is always simultaneously seen as a history of East Asia, as well as a history of mankind. For many decades since 1945, Korean history as an academic discipline in the US has struggled with what one senior East Asian scholar

once characterized as a “barstool” problem. In his view, East Asian studies in American higher education institutions were like a sequestered section of a pub with just one or two stools to sit on: and invariably, these stools used to be marked with the labels “China” and “Japan.” Studies of Korea, Viet Nam, Taiwan, Indonesia, or even the Philippines, a former colony of the US, simply had to make do with a supplementary status to the studies of China and/or Japan.

Twenty-some years later, Korean studies in the US is operating in a markedly different environment. From my observation and experience as a practicing academic engaged with various activities and programs promoting Korean studies, such as, for instance, Fulbright Fellowship, I can earnestly declare that I have never encountered a higher level of interest and enthusiasm in the South Korean culture among young Americans than today. To be sure, many scholars affiliated with the US-based higher education institutions routinely express skepticism about the “rising status” of Korea in the world and its positive impact on English-language Korean studies. This is not really surprising. The basic institutional orientation of the American academia toward Korean studies has not changed drastically. The numerical increase in the number of students studying in Korea-related social science or humanities courses, or Korean language on various levels, while unmistakably real, has not been explosive.

It is no secret that study of “foreign” cultures in the US has always been a niche effort, reserved for a small group of minorities, racial or otherwise: this big picture is unlikely to fundamentally change for some time. Within the discipline of history, American history and, to a lesser extent, European history will take up larger shares of the available pie for the foreseeable future. The crucial change in the last two decades, in my view, is the shifting motivations of those who enter into Korean studies as well as diversification of the agents of these scholarly endeavors. The global success of the South Korean popular culture has been impacting, and surely will continue to impact, Korean studies. Many young Americans increasingly do not see South Korea as “that country where our soldiers are stationed and may go into a war with its Northern counterpart,” but a disseminator of vexingly attractive cultural products, in a situation analogous to the way Japanese animation, Hello Kitty and other cultural products had changed how “Japan” was perceived by Americans in the last three decades.¹⁾ This change is significant, because it means that the younger generation of Korean studies scholars in the US, within the higher degree programs or already out in the professional domain, prefer to know more about *Korea itself*

1) Douglas McCray, “Japan’s Gross National Cool,” *Foreign Policy*, May-June, 2002; Susan Napier, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke: Experiencing Japanese. Animation* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2001); Christine Yano, *Pink Globalization: Hello Kitty’s Trek across the Pacific* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

and/or *Koreans themselves*, rather than holding an instrumental view of Korea as something “useful” or “valuable” for them as Americans. The new scholarship is gradually but inexorably moving away from the hegemonic imaginary of South Korea as a model case of “industrial development and economic success” as well as that of North and South Korea as “victim(s)” or “pawn(s)” of the American Cold War imperialism.²⁾

II. Colonial Modernity

The late 1980s and early 1990s was the epoch characterized by world-historical events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, and by drastic changes in political and social environment of South Korea, including a monumental transition to the civilian democratic government of Kim Young Sam. The Korean historical studies of the colonial period in 1990s, culminating in many ways in the landmark publication of Michael Robinson and Gi-Wook Shin's *Colonial Modernity in Korea* (1999), was greatly impacted by both these global historical changes as well as democratization and liberalization of the Korean society, at least in relation to academic discourse. This was an era in which a far greater inter-Pacific dialogue than hitherto existed took place between the newly energized “leftist” and nationalist Korean-language historiography and the American historical studies of South Korea by a new generation, including those who had first learned in depth about Korea through the Peace Corps volunteerism.

To raise but one pertinent example, Carter J. Eckert's highly influential *Offspring of Empire* (1992), despite its misguided reputation in some circles as a work disparaging nationalist conceptions of Korean history, does not really engage in a thoroughgoing critique of nationalism as a conceptual category. Eckert's book in fact resonates strongly with the objectives and agendas of the “revisionist” Korean-language historiography of 1980s such as the essays contained in the

2) Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981, 1990). Michael D. Shin, writing for one of the more prestigious Korean-language journal for professional historians, *Yŏksa pip'yŏng*, in 2002, broadly characterizes the post-1945 evolution of Korean studies in the US as manifestation of the Orientalist perspective within the framework of modernization theories. Shin portrays Bruce Cumings's scholarship as the fresh, new critical voice that had begun to overcome (pro-capitalist) US-centered modernization theories and Orientalist perspective. I would like to note that Cumings's works, while significant and pioneering, are by themselves neither entirely free from US-centric viewpoint nor from the kind of “left-wing” Orientalism that continues to posit “Koreans” or “Korean people” (as in *hanguk minjung*) as the essentialized Other (as in “victims of the US imperialism”) to Self, the hegemonic US empire and its internal critics. Michael D Shin, “Miguk nae hangukhak kyebo,” *Yŏksa pip'yŏng*, no. 59, Summer, 2002.

multivolume *Haebang chŏnhusa ŭi insik* (The Perceptions of the History of Inter-Liberation Periods, 1979~1988) published from Hangilsa. In the later chapters of the book, Eckert critically examines the Koch'ang Kims and their close collaboration with the Japanese colonial state for the purpose of advancing their class interests. Indeed, in the context of early 1990s scholarship the book was clearly progressive (*chinbojŏk*) and pioneering in its tackling of the hitherto taboo subject of late colonial period “collaboration,” along with other significant works of the colonial period history such as Michael Robinson’s analysis of the Korean “cultural nationalists” in the colonial Korea.³⁾

Likewise, unlike some Korean historian’s lopsided characterization of Bruce Cumings’s scholarship as friendly to “indigenous” Korean political and social development (as expressed in, say, popular support for the revolutionary committees in North Korea) while Eckert’s work as hostile to it, their works were united in seeing the industrial working class as main agents of historical change in modern Korean history and saw the colonized Korea’s industrial development as fundamentally subordinate to the Japanese capitalist “core” in a distinctively colonial relationship. In *Offspring of Empire*, little theoretical or ideological challenge is mounted against the epistemic category of “nationalism,” nor does any significant questioning of the seemingly self-evident distinction between “nationalists” and “collaborators” take place. Eckert instead expresses strong skepticism at the ’80s Korean conservative efforts to defend Kim Sŏng-su’s reputation, very much in line with the views and opinions of the left-progressive Korean intellectuals (and students) of the day.

The critique of (Korean-language) nationalist historiography was much more strongly and extensively advanced by Michael Robinson and Shin Gi-wook (and Eckert himself in his “Epilogue” to the edited volume) in *Colonial Modernity in Korea* (1999), signaling a clearer break from the leftist-nationalist Korean-language historiography of ’80s. The theoretical basis for this critique was a cluster of positions that we might characterize as “the cultural turn.” Such an orientation is apparent in Robinson and Shin’s invocation of Antonio Gramsci’s concept of “hegemony” and Michel Foucault’s “technologies of power.” Many of the essays contained in the volume ventured into the territories of social and cultural histories of the Korean colonial experience, exploring subjects such as media networks including radio broadcasting, women’s movement, the paekchŏng activism and so on, understudied or neglected until then. The editors introduce the model of the Korean colonial society as an ecosystem, in which three variables, modernity, colonialism and nationalism, interacted with one another, and developed complex patterns of alliance, resistance

3) Michael Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920~1925*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988.

and compromise.⁴⁾ They also argue that Korea's modern experience cannot be broken apart into discrete "Western," Japanese and Korean components, and call for recognition of the fluidity and (historical) contingency of the processes of constructing identities such as "Koreans" or "Korean men." They suggest, "[to] understand a dynamic process such as identity formation, we must consider that identities coexist, rise and fall in significance depending on circumstances, context and their relationship to large and/or small structures, in society."⁵⁾

However, again, from the contemporary perspective, this modality of triad interaction proposed by the editors appears reluctant to acknowledge that nationalism in the colonial period was as much "constructed" as "modernity" and "colonialism" were. Of course, they categorically deny that there was a pristine, unsullied conception of the Korean ethno-nation in the pre-colonial Korea, but then again they do not really push their invocation of the ideas of "invention of tradition" derived from Hobsbawm and Ranger to its logical limits. Instead of directly problematizing the Korean conception of *minjok*, they want to call attention to alternative formulations of collective identities — some agrarian ideologue's conception of "peasants-farmers," the "people" as conceptualized by the late-phase Sin Ch'ae-ho in his anarchist mode, and so on — but these are presented more as intriguing possibilities than empirically retrievable social imaginaries. While it is worthwhile and fascinating to explore these possibilities, in doing so we might yet lose sight of actual agents of historical change, both individuals and collectivities, always already subsumed under the category of *minjok* (as we shall see below in the work of Sungyun Lim, women even at this late date remain the most obvious and challenging subject that cannot be adequately contained under the category of "ethnicity" or "nation").

In my view, *Colonial Modernity in Korea* still privileges the heuristic category of nationalism, falling short of providing a truly far-reaching critique of the supposedly "naturalized" category of "Korean ethnic-nation," except for in the essays by Kenneth Wells, Kim Joong-seop, Chul-woo Lee and others that illustrate how desires, aspirations and objectives of subaltern social groups (women, the *paekch'ong*, and so on) had been subsumed, erased and essentialized under the rubric of ethnic nation. In this sense, too, I would prefer the triad of colonialism, modernity and *identity* over one of colonialism, modernity and nationalism proposed in the book. More recently, a more critical understanding of modernity as well as the centrality of colonialism in the expansion of modernity throughout the world have become widely accepted in both English and

4) Shin Gi-wook, Michael Robinson, eds. *Colonial Modernity in Korea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 5~7.

5) *Ibid.*, pp. 15~16.

Korean-language scholarships, further decentralizing the epistemic and ontological status of ethnic nation-state.⁶⁾

III. The Foucauldian Turn: Toward Social and Cultural History of the Colonial Experience

As a matter of fact, as the editors and contributors of *Colonial Modernity* as well as Carter Eckert in another occasion acknowledged, the Foucauldian perspective has had probably the greatest theoretical impact on thinking about the Korean colonial experience in the last two decades.⁷⁾ Corollary to its growing influence has been the increasing acceptance of the view that colonialism has never been “special” or “alien” to human experience but has always been embedded in the everyday exercise of power in all modern societies, “civilized” or “barbaric,” “democratic” or “authoritarian.” The above observation is corroborated by the fact that Kim Chin-gyun and Chŏng Kŭn-sik’s edited volume (1997) on modern subjectivity and disciplinary technologies of the colonial regime has remained one of the most, perhaps *the* most, frequently cited Korean-language works in English-language Korean studies. Its sociologically-minded engagement with the ways in which education, labor, medicine, hygiene and family relations constituted and constructed the “modern Korean subjects” under the colonial rule has been followed up by such English-language studies as, among others, Hongyoung Lee, et al. (2013), a conference collection including, not surprisingly, a contribution by Chŏng Kŭn-sik [Jeong Keunsik] on the colonial regulation of the diseased bodies in the form of leprosy relief work, Theodore Jun Yoo (2016) on the construction and management of mental illness as a category of medical treatment, Katarzyna J. Cwiertka (2012) on the transformation of colonial cuisine and cultural construction of the “Korean food,” and Sonja M. Kim (2020) and Jin-kyoung Park (2013, 2014, 2017) on the intersections of medicine, gender and discourses on demographics and reproduction during the colonial period. In this regard, it is interesting to ponder whether an urban history of colonial Korea such as Todd Henry’s *Assimilating Seoul* (2014), had it been researched and published, say, in late ’90s, would have contained, as it does now, the substantive discussions of “bodily disciplines” in the spaces of everyday life, as

6) Yun Hae-dong, *Singminji ūi hoesaek chidae* (Seoul: Yŏksa Pip’yŏngsa, 2003): *Singminji kŭndae ūi paerŏdoksŭ* (Seoul: Humanist, 2007); Sin Hyŏng-gi, *Minjok iyagi rŭl nŏmŏsŏ* (Seoul: Sam’in, 2003); Kim Chul, *Reading Colonial Korea Through Fiction: The Ventriloquist* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2018).

7) Carter J. Eckert, “Hokubei ni okeru kankoku shokuminchi-ki kenkyū: saikin no dōkō,” *Tōyō bunka kenkyū*, no. 10, March, 2008.

manifested through such topics as enforcement of hygiene and sanitation practices as well as the ritualized and aesthetic dimensions of state mobilization conducted through Shinto institutions and practices.

However, in the final analysis, the social and cultural history of colonial-period Korean history in the Foucauldian mold, more influential in expanding the perimeters of the discipline of history and promoting extensive dialogues with sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, art history and other disciplines, than in “converting” its practitioners to radical social constructivist (sometimes inadequately labeled as “postmodern”) theoretical approaches, is still in its early phase, even compared to the similar developments in Chinese (Sinophone) and Japanese studies. One indication of this is the Korean studies’s lagging behind the latter in the subfield of history of sexuality: we have neither the Korean studies equivalent of the sweeping yet intricate reconstruction of the various modalities and formulations of the concept of “sex change” in the Chinese-speaking societies across the entire duration of modern period by Howard Chiang (2020), nor a magisterial narrative of the Japanese “invention” of the very discursive category of “sex” and “sexuality” and the corresponding pathologization of certain sexual practices as well as classification, ordering and disciplining of male and female bodies by Sabine Frühstück (2003). However, as Todd Henry (2020) on the long-suppressed and unacknowledged presence of the LGBTQ agency and culture in Korean history, and Eunjung Kim (2017)’s challenge to the modern and contemporary ideas about disability and its relationship to masculine, corporeal formulations of Korean nationalism indicate, it is more likely than not such gaps will be rapidly closed in the near future.

IV. Contributions of the Literary Studies

Discussing the intersectionality among colonialism, modernity and identity, one cannot ignore the accomplishments of literary studies, to the point that any advanced-level course on the Korean colonial experience must include in its curriculum a substantial amount of the critical analyses of colonial-period literature. There have been two important developments in the field of Korean literature leading to the surge of interest in colonial modernity and critique of the nationalist narrative. First, the ’80s and ’90s excavation and exposé by Im Chong-guk and others of “collaborationist” literary works by erstwhile doyens of national(ist) literature have ironically ended up legitimizing studies of these supposedly “shameful” works of literature, eventually

undermining the mainstream view that late '30s and early '40s was the “period of darkness (*amhŭkki*)” in terms of literary accomplishments. Second, a series of erudite and sophisticated analyses of modernist literature, focused on those works written in the period generally perceived as marked by the decline of leftist-Marxist ideology and “realism,” have been published, by, among others, Christopher Hanscome (2013), Janet Poole (2014), Travis Workman (2016), John Whittier Treat (2012), Park Sun-young (2015), Theodore Hughes (2012) and Aimee Nayoung Kwon (2015). They for the most part bring to the foreground the problematic intersection of modernity and coloniality. What they invariably illuminate is that the late colonial works by canonized and non-canonized writers and critics — Yi Kwang-su, Yŏm Sang-sŏp, Yi T'ae-jun, Im Hwa, Kim Sa-ryang, Chang Hyŏk-chu, Ch'ae Man-sik among others — compellingly responded to the agonistic conditions of colonial modernity. Kwon, in particular, critiques the Korean scholars's valorization of Kim Sa-ryang as a “true nationalist writer” and instead explores his struggles with the colonizer's propensity to characterize him as a “minor writer,” i.e. a writer writing against the “major” culture of Japan who reserves the right to (sometimes sympathetically and condescendingly at the same time) “authenticate” such writer and his/her depictions of “the suffering” of his/her “people,” a perspective that she sees reproduced in the contemporary literary studies of colonial-period Korean literature. Such a perspective, Kwon points out, turns a blind eye toward Kim's subjective condition as a hybrid being, caught in between exclusive categories of “Korean” and “Japanese”.

What Kwon's study compellingly illustrates is that a mode of social and political existence often inadequately essentialized as a “collaborator” (“pro-Japanese faction” or *ch'inilp'a*) needs to be reconceptualized as a “colonized subject.” To Kwon, Kim Sa-ryang as well as his literary characters — Hyŏn-ryong/Genryū in *Pegasus* (1940) and the half-Japanese and half-Korean boy Haruo in *Into the Light* (1939) — are the colonized subjects in the sense that they reflect the struggles by Kim to recognize and (ultimately unsuccessfully) discipline the antinomical aspects of such subjectivity. Kwon's persuasive analysis only underscores the fact that there are still few English-language studies that directly engage with the often agonistic, sometimes schizophrenic subjectivity of the so-called “collaborators” among Koreans. This is hardly surprising, considering that accusing a person of “being” or “defending” *ch'inilp'a* still remains a potent political weapon in South Korea today (2020).⁸⁾

8) The challenges English-language historiography of modern China brought against the “official” categorization of “collaborators” (in Chinese usage, *hanjian*, or “traitor to the Han race”) serve as an illustrative comparison to the Korean case. See Timothy Brook, *Collaboration: Japanese Agents and Local Elites in Wartime China* (Cambridge,

V. 'We Met the Traitors and They Were Us,' or the Messy Lived Lives of the Colonized Koreans

Indeed, it is telling that the most important English-language book-length study of “collaborators” in Korean colonial context, Moon Yumi’s *Populist Collaborators* (2013), is focused on the period that predates the formal colonization of Korea by the Japanese empire. In this superbly researched book, Moon seeks to rehabilitate the agency of those Koreans often dismissively blocked together under the larger categories of “people” or “nation.” She refuses, for one, to subsume the discursive and praxiological orientations of the local Ilchinhoe members under the rubric of proto-nationalist “crowd,” whose teleological objective is always already pre-determined as building of “our nation- tate (*uri nara*, unquestioningly understood as synonymous to *minjok kukka*),” or conversely essentialize them retrojectively as always already spiraling into the acts of traitorous pro-Japanese collaboration. In the course of excavating and analyzing a wide range of primary sources, Moon presents a complex (disturbingly so for those Koreans unwilling to entertain any possibility that the two categories of “nationalism” and “collaboration” might not be mutually exclusive) picture of those local Koreans, from a variety of class and status backgrounds, who envisioned a populist community with many characteristics of modern society but not necessarily endowed with autonomous political sovereignty.⁹⁾ Moon shows that, in the end, the alternative vision of populist community distinct from a modern nation-state evinced in the ideas and practices of Ilchinhoe, such as designation of some members as “elected supervisors” in some local areas, was also ultimately undermined and incorporated by yet another form of modernity, spearheaded by bureaucratic rationalism of the Japanese colonial state, representing a non-democratic, authoritarian form of governance.¹⁰⁾

Indeed, “our” contemporary understanding of the pre-colonial Korean “customs” and “cultures” cannot ever be free from the interventions of colonial modernity and the subsequent post-Liberation efforts to “roll back” the epistemological mechanisms of “understanding” the past

MA: Harvard University Press, 2005): Christian Henriot & Wen-hsin Yeh, eds. *In the Shadow of the Rising Sun: Shanghai under the Japanese Occupation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004): Dan Shao, *Remote Homeland, Recovered Borderland: Manchus, Manchukuo and Manchuria, 1907-1985* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011): Yun Xia, *Down with the Traitors: Justice and Nationalism in Wartime China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018), among other works.

9) Moon, Yumi, *Populist Collaborators: The Ilchinhoe and the Japanese Colonization of Korea, 1896-1910* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), pp. 190-193.

10) *Ibid.*, pp. 260-266.

instituted by it. To “straighten” the Korean history “distorted (*waegok*)” by the Japanese colonial experience often results in effacement or erasure of heterogeneity and the unmistakable gaps between ideology and praxis present in the lifeworlds of the “Korean people.” Perhaps even more so than Yumi Moon’s research, Sungyun Lim’s study (2018) of the transformations of family law in the colonial period, and especially how the “unremarkable” women, including widows, daughters and concubines, have actively utilized the “alien” conceptions of family imposed by the Japanese colonial state to promote their objectives, grapples with these issues. In her book, the gap between ideology and praxis is explored with a great attention paid to individual cases and concrete impacts of the High Court decisions on the lives of the women who had initiated litigations under her scrutiny as well as the broader discourse on positions and agencies of women. Lim’s careful analysis of the court documents and other primary sources illuminates that such imaginaries as New Women and “romantic love” were neither mere ideological constructs nor consumerist-capitalist archetypes, frequently dismissed as such by contemporary academics. Likewise, Lim demonstrates that the colonial state’s series of effort to transplant the Japanese *ie* system in Korean soil, culminating in the Surname Change (*ch’angssi kaemyŏng*) program during the war mobilization period in fact had the effect of strengthening certain aspects of Korean lineage system, having been codified as “uniquely Korean cultural traits” by the Japanese.¹¹⁾

To put it in another way, Lim’s study shows the readers just how complex and fraught with potential antinomies the changes brought to the family system by the colonial authorities were. However, her research also demonstrates that Japanese colonizers had flexible definitions of “traditional Korean culture and customs” and sometimes compromised with the male Korean elite in the latter’s objective of preserving agnatic lineage principles. In other words, the Japanese colonizers were not always designating themselves as “agents of modernity.” When it suited their immediate objectives, they were quite ready to play the role of protectors of the “beautiful traditions and good customs (*mip’ung yangsok*)” of Korea.¹²⁾ In sum, Sungyun Lim presents one of the most eloquent and persuasive critique of the often-unstated view among Koreans that there was some kind of “distortion” of a “correct form” of modernity in the colonial period. In reality, both traditions and modernities were actively redressed, rediscovered and flagrantly “invented” by both the Japanese colonizers and the Korean colonized. Her study also proves that women,

11) Lim Sungyun, *Rules of the House: Family Law and Domestic Disputes in Colonial Korea* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), pp. 104–106.

12) Brandt, Kim, *Kingdom of Beauty: Mingei and the Politics of Folk Art in Imperial Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2007); Pai Hyung Il, *Heritage Management in Korea and Japan: The Politics of Antiquity and Identity* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013).

caught between two patriarchal systems, Japanese colonialism and Korean nationalism, were passive victims of neither, perfectly capable of selectively aligning with, manipulating, and resisting various forms of discourses on “beautiful traditions and good customs” and “progressive” values of modernity.

VI. Beyond the National History of Colonial Korea

I have previously discussed the controversies surrounding the notion of colonial modernity applied to Korean history.¹³⁾ My conclusion was that alleged opponents in the debates on colonial modernity among Korean historians and social scientists of late '90s more or less shared the teleological conception of modernity as culminating in capitalist development and construction of a monocultural (for many Koreans, monoethnic) nation-state. Things have changed quite substantially since then in Korean-language scholarship as well. Most of the English-language studies I have discussed above published since *Colonial Modernity in Korea* share three characteristics that I had identified in 2004 as the future direction for the history of Korean colonial experience: *differentiation*, in that many categories of analysis such as nation, ethnicity and “people,” deemed as existing *a priori* or ahistorically always present, became increasingly problematized and deconstructed: *uncovering antinomies*, through which historians would accept the self-contradictions, mutually incompatible orientations and even chaotic confusion in the ideas and actions of Korean and Japanese historical actors: and finally, *transnational scope*, which in concrete terms mean not only that a study of the Korean colonial experience cannot in any meaningful way be decoupled from a study of the Japanese imperialism, but also that such a study should be cognizant of the history of modernity and colonialism writ at large over and across the boundaries of “Korea” or “Japan.”

It might be argued that a work of Korean history of the colonial period that most closely and successfully follows the template laid out by Carter Eckert, Michael Robinson and others in '80s and '90s is Uchida Jun's *Brokers of Empire* (2011). Uchida by and large accepts the format of a chronological, narrative history charting the evolution of settler colonialism by the Japanese, based on a wide range of archival sources that should serve as a model for any aspiring graduate

13) Kim, Kyu Hyun, “Reflections on the Problem of Colonial Modernity and ‘Collaboration’ in Modern Korean History,” *Journal of International and Area Studies*, vol. 11, no. 3, 2004, pp. 95~107.

student specializing in Korean history. And yet, Uchida’s work, without actively foregrounding specific theoretical framework or analytic approaches, amply displays all three orientations of the recent studies of Korean colonial experience that I have outlined above. She carefully differentiates between the settlers and the officials of the Government-General and other “components” of the colonial state, often blocked together as simply “Japanese” (*ilbon* or *ilbon’indŭl*) in many Korean-language scholarships. She also uncovers, while unspooling a coherent narrative spanning several decades, many self-contradictions and potentially incompatible orientations in the actions and ideas of the Japanese settlers, refuting and resisting, for instance, “nativization” of themselves yet continuing to hold onto their identity as “peninsula people (*hantōjin*).” Many of Uchida’s insights could not have been gained if she had insisted on limiting her scope to the traditional category of “Korean history,” which would have critically limited her understanding of the settlers in Korea in the context of the Japanese history of migration and diaspora formation.

She suggests the possible development of dialogic communities within the structures imposed by the Japanese colonial empire. One example is the shift of position by a settler opinionmaker Aoyagi Tsunatarō from a supporter of assimilation to its critic, reflecting his growing appreciation for ethnic identity of the Koreans.¹⁴⁾ She also discusses how the common objective of pursuing industrial development could unite Koreans, Japanese settlers and colonial officials into alliances of various configurations.¹⁵⁾ Uchida is in the end perhaps a bit too cautious to challenge the contemporary (Korean) conceptualization of “nationalism” as applied to the colonial period. It is notable that she emphasizes the essential meaninglessness of *kōminka* policies, reduced to bodily practices such as calisthenics as well as public rituals such as bowing to the direction of the Imperial Palace, yet her own research findings illustrate that Koreans were capable of “gaming the system,” for instance, manipulating the *naisen ittai* program to demand inclusion into the Japanese citizenship and enfranchisement.

Finally, the expanding transnational scope of “Korean studies” is increasingly illuminating those features of the actually lived lives of Koreans that could not easily be accommodated into the epistemic box called a nation-state or an empire. The recent English-language studies of the Japanese empire or, in an even broader configuration, East Asian modern regionalities that, for instance, talks less about “China” and more about “Sinosphere” or “Sinophone societies,”¹⁶⁾ testify

14) Jun Uchida, *Brokers of Empire: Japanese Settler Colonialism in Korea, 1876–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Asia Center, 2011), pp. 190–201.

15) Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 252–256.

16) David Ambaras, *Japan’s Imperial Underworlds: Intimate Encounters at the Border of the Empire* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Howard Chiang, *After Eunuchs: Science, Medicine, and the Transformation*

to this development: Kate McDonald (2017) on the travel discourse, E. Taylor Atkins's (2010) study of the colonial "Korea boom," eerily reminiscent in many ways of the contemporary "Hallyu" discourse, Christopher Hanscome and Dennis Washburn's (2016) edited volume that casts the net widely throughout the entire East Asia to explore the constructions and representations of race and ethnicity, and so on. Sayaka Chatani's *Nation-Empire* (2018), for example, attempts a comparative analysis of the state mobilization of rural youths in 1930s Japan, Taiwan and Korea, through examinations of agrarian youth associations (*seinendan*). Rather than seeing the Korean youth associations as simple apparatuses with which the colonial state could exploit and mobilize the Korean youths, Chatani illustrates the extent to which Korean (and Japanese and Taiwanese) rural youngsters actively sought social mobility within the Japanese empire by means of internalizing state ideology of imperialism and agrarian nationalism. She states: "By appropriating the global and imperial discourse of agrarianism, many youths in the countryside attempted to imagine a rural modernity—defined fluidly by the denial, transformation and limitation of urban modernity."¹⁷ The conventional division between "nationalism" and "collaboration" does not play much of a role in her study. She instead emphasizes the generational and rural-urban divide that sometimes could bring together the youths of Japan and its colonies.

VII. Conclusion

As I have examined above, the future of English-language studies of Korean history, even when we narrow the scope down to the studies of Korean colonial experience, is bright. Many exciting new studies are coming out into the world as I write this sentence, and more will be forthcoming. I strongly feel, however, a thoroughgoing critique of nationalism as not only epistemic category of understanding certain seemingly self-evident ideas and prescriptions for the South Korean identity but also as a normative principle for organizing knowledge about "Korean history" is still needed in English language. Without such reckoning, there always will be built-in limitations to the Korean studies' engagement with the realities of colonial experience. To be blunt, *ch'ŏnŭl p'a* should be deconstructed as an analytic term. Likewise, historians must always be

of Sex in Modern China (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

17) Sayaka Chatani, *Nation-Empire: Ideology and Rural Youth Mobilization in Japan and Its Colonies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), p. 12.

able to explicate, too, when they call historical figures “collaborators,” what that exactly means. Korean history should not be content in producing a series of nationalist heroes’ biographies (*wiinjŏn*) with sidebar archival research for the sole purpose of authorizing the biographer’s moral and political claims. The past two decades of impressive English-language research, in my view, presents plenty of evidence to offset such an obstinate, dare I say, “conservative” (even if such acts aggressively present themselves as “progressive”) adherence to the old ways of history-writing.

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■ 국문요약 ■

국사를 넘어선 한국인의 삶의 복잡성 탐색
: 한국의 식민지 경험에 대한 최근 1999~2019년 영어 연구: 간략한 검토

김 규 현*

이 논문은 미국에서 출간된 식민지 시기(1910~1945) 한국학에 대한 지난 20년간(1999~2019)의 영어 연구의 역사기술을 검토한다. 최근 수십 년 사이 학문적 동인의 다양화와 높아지는 “한국” 자체에 대한 관심으로 인해, 영어 학술은 앞선 세대에서의와 한국에 기반한 연구에서 한국사 연구에 오랫동안 스며들었던 “식민지 근대화”, “부역”, “국사”라는 체험적 범주를 점차 문제화하여 왔다. 카터 J. 에커트의 『제국의 자식들』(1992)과 마이클 로빈슨과 신기욱의 『한국에서의 식민지 근대화』(1999) 및 그들의 공통적인 비판들을 포함하는 초기의 고전적 연구들에 대한 재검토와 함께 시작하여, 식민지 시대에 대한 몇몇 후속 영어 연구가 그 세대의 기존 비유 안에 대체로 남아 있음에도 불구하고 어떻게 그러한 분류에 대한 비판적인 검토를 제공하려고 시도해왔는지에 대해 논의한다. 보다 최근의 학문은 미래 이 분야의 학생들과 학자들에게 지속적으로 알려주는 세 가지 주요 경향들 쪽으로, 즉 기꺼이 상정된 “국가”, “민족”, 그리고 민족성의 개념들을 묻고 해체하는 “차별”, (“부역”과 “민족주의”같이) 상호 배타적이라 여겨지는 기존의 범주화 안에서의 자체모순을 수용하는 “적나라한 이율배반”, 그리고 민족의 범위를 초월함으로써 식민주의 역사를 인식하는 “초국가적 범위” 쪽으로 이동해왔다.

[주제어] 한국학, 식민시기(1910~1945), 식민지 근대화, 부역(附逆), 국사, 제국주의, 민족, 정체성, 차별, 적나라한 이율배반, 초국가적 범위

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