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EAST ASIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE REVIEW

Exploring Colonial Modernity through the Dynamics of Multilayered Time and Space

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Itagaki Ryūta 板垣龍太. *Hanguk kŭndae ūi yŏksa minjokji: Kyŏngbuk sangju ūi singminji kyŏnghŏm* 한국 근대의 역사민족지: 경북 상주의 식민지 경험 [A historical ethnography of Korean modernity: Colonial experience in Sangju, Kyŏngbuk Province]. Translated by Hong Jong-Wook and Yi Taehwa. Seoul: Hyeon, 2015. ISBN: 9788984945234.

Paradigms of Korean Modern Historical Research

During the last half century, there have been dynamic changes and developments in the paradigms of modern Korean historical studies. Starting in the 1960s, scholars of modern Korean history began to assume the task of moving beyond the colonially influenced historical perspective, developing the so-called “internal development theory,” which maintains that Koreans moved toward modernization by their own strength and motivation. In the 1980s, a counter-theory known as “colonial modernization theory” emerged, suggesting that Korea’s modernization is instead attributable to the circumstances of colonialism—a premise somewhat difficult for Koreans to accept on an emotional level. Most recently, around the turn of the twenty-first century, a new set of ideas, often referred to as “colonial modernity theory,” have emerged, criticizing both of the aforementioned theories and seeking an alternative paradigm. This new theory suggests that while internal development theory and colonial modernization theory may seem to conflict, they actually share an epistemological commonality. That is, they both posit modernization as Korea’s goal or ultimate good, and they assume that nation (*minjok*) and the nation-state are the agents of modernization. In other words, modernism and nationalism are at work in both sets of ideas.¹

In contrast, colonial modernity theory endeavors to examine modernism and nationalism from a critical perspective. Colonial modernity theorists have adopted a critical mindset characterized by concepts that have the prefix *post-* attached to them, such as

postmodernism or *postcolonialism*, and have published a number of notable works in the areas of cultural studies, discourse analysis, microhistory (the history of everyday life), and the new history of people (*minjung*), which can be understood as the Korean version of subaltern studies (Yun et al. 2006; Kong and Jung 2006). Colonial modernity theory created quite a stir among young scholars, yet it is limited in a number of aspects. For example, despite its original intentions, it tends to fall into the trap of treating modernism as almighty. Let me elaborate on this.

In general, colonial modernity theory considers modernity to be something that was formed after the “Western impact.” Therefore, it has a strong tendency to conceive of the modern and the premodern (*chönkūndae*) as a rupture. Thus, it is unable to understand the “premodern experience” in connection with the historical processes that unfolded after the modern period. Furthermore, colonial modernity theory underscores the image of modernity or the nation-state as a powerful predator that subsumes and claims everything premodern into its territory. Even in its criticism of modernity, then, it falls into a kind of modern-centrism that, although unintentional, privileges modernity’s power over the premodern (Miyazima and Bae 2015).² I believe that, more than anything else, in order for colonial modernity theory to mature, it must overcome these limitations. From this perspective, the book by Ryuta Itagaki reviewed here holds great significance for the current paradigm of Korean modern historical studies.

Critical Position and Analytical Framework: Continuity of Time and Articulation of Heterogeneous Elements

Ryuta Itagaki wrote a dissertation in cultural anthropology at Tokyo University in 2005 titled “Colonial Experience in Local Communities of Korea: Historical Ethnography on Sangju, Kyöngbuk,” which he then modified and published in 2008 as 朝鮮近代の歴史民族誌:慶北尚州の植民地経験 (A historical ethnography of Korean modernity: Colonial experience in Sangju, Kyöngbuk). The book reviewed here is the Korean translation of this book, which came out in 2015 and included as its preface a paper titled “The Question of Local History” that Itagaki presented at a seminar hosted by the Institute for Korean History in September 2011. This preface introduces Itagaki’s research career to Korean readers, along with his opinions on the questions and problems that arise in studies of local history. The Korean translation and publication of this book, with its sharp critical approach and intriguing critical stance—in addition to a wealth of information on Korean issues—seem

long overdue. Still, thanks to the efforts of professors Hong Jong-Wook, who has worked closely with the author at Doshisha University for a long time, and Yi Taehwa, who majored in folklore studies in Korea, the book finally came out as an excellent work of translation.

Itagaki puts forth in his introduction that “the objective of this book is to present colonial experience concretely by focusing on the case of Sangju located in Kyöngsang North Province” (29). In this project of defining “Koreans’ colonial experience,” he takes as his starting point overcoming the aforementioned perception of a rupture between the modern and the premodern:

Reorganization of state power through colonization did not bring about the shift of the dominant class and culture immediately; moreover, colonization was not what eventually triggered the social changes. Also, even if capitalism did reshuffle the social relations, the effect of such reorganization did not penetrate through the entire Korean society all at once.... History does not unfold itself ignoring “the given and inherited circumstances with which [men] are directly confronted”— to borrow Marx’s words.³ In order to apprehend the situation [surrounding these social changes] in a comprehensive fashion,... what should be revealed is the state in which “heterogeneous” elements, in other words those that appear to have come from different “ages,” coexist in the same period. (29–30)

The argument that the temporal continuity between the premodern and the modern, and the overlapping and coexistence of heterogeneous elements in the modern period, should be revealed and elucidated has already been proposed by a number of scholars (see Chung S. 2003; Jung, Hong, et al. 2003; Jung, Kim, et al. 2004; Ch’ungnam Taehakkyo Naep’o Chiyöck Yön’gudan 2006; Ha et al. 2007). Yet Itagaki takes this argument one step further by not merely bringing up that such a perception is necessary, but by proposing a theoretical framework that allows those aspects to be understood in a more structural and systematic manner. This is what makes his approach so intriguing and significant.

In the introduction, Itagaki presents his analytical framework, which is comprised of two intersecting axes of time and space. First, he sets up the temporal axis, in which the continuity between the early modern (*künse*) and the modern (*kündae*) exists.⁴ When using the notions of early modern and modern, he distinguishes between the synchronic concept of periodization in history and a (somewhat qualitative) concept that refers to sociocultural features. (Distinctions between the different uses are made by putting quotation marks around the latter set of concepts, which appears as “early modern” and “modern.”) Early modern as a synchronic concept refers to the time period between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. This may coincide with the “early modern” (K: *künse*, J: *kinsei*) and the “early modern” in

the developmental stages of Japanese and European history respectively, but the term was not chosen to apply the framework of “developmental stages” that can be found in those histories. Modern (in the synchronic sense) is associated with the nineteenth century—in particular, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, considered the Age of Empire. By the nineteenth century, the sovereign state system had undergone globalization, which ultimately gave rise to the “division” and “unitization” of the world in the form of imperialism. Itagaki notes that Japan became the empire and Korea the colony during this process.

Kŭnse as the (qualitative) concept that refers to sociocultural features bears resemblance to the concept of “tradition” that Miyazima Hiroshi presented in quotation marks in his description of the “early modern.”⁵ With respect to the “early modern,” Itagaki pays attention to the economic aspects of the distribution of peasant farming and the development of local market networks; the settlement of local aristocratic families (*sajok*); and the widespread distribution of *sŏwŏn*, local Confucian academies, or *sŏdang*, elementary-level Confucian education centers. Thus, “early modern” is viewed as something that can persist in the modern period as well.

The “modern” as it pertains to sociocultural features refers to the diverse modes of life that were often simply considered as “new ways” or “new styles” in the local communities of Korea. In this book, Itagaki examines the following examples in particular: the penetration of Japanese people and the colonial administration; the advancement of a subordinate commercial farming model based on the relationship between landowner and peasant; the rise of local industry; the introduction of a new school system; the emergence of new types of local elites such as *yuji* (community influencers), *ch’ŏngnyŏn* (youth), and *chunggyŏn inmul* (backbone figures); and the deployment of the independence movement or social business based on the meritocracy. Itagaki states that the basic task of his book, predicated on this analytical framework, is “to discuss concretely the ways in which ‘early modern’ and ‘modern’ have been articulated during the reorganization of local communities in the modern period, while the dynamics of the early modern society persisted” (35).⁶

Next, Itagaki sets up the axis of a heterogeneous space consisting of the “town center” (*ŭmnae*, a word formed by combining *ŭp* [town] and *nae* [inside or center]), on the one hand, and the “farming district” (*nongch’onbu*), on the other, in order to capture the spatial unevenness of the “modern.” First, he chooses “town” (*ŭp*) as the local scale of his research. The *ŭp* was the unit of administrative districts, often referred to as *kun* (prefecture) by scholars of the Chosŏn dynasty, by which the government exercised local administration or

the local communities self-governed during the Chosŏn dynasty. It was the area in which local politics and social movements took place during the Japanese occupation period as well (Ji 2007). The *ŭp* consisted of the town center, where the administrative offices were concentrated, and the farming district that surrounded it (37, figure 0–1). Between the two areas, relative differences and an uneven relationship have been embedded since the early modern period. *Yangban*, the aristocrats who composed the highest ruling class in the Chosŏn dynasty, resided in the farming district located on the outskirts, while local clerks, who were in charge of the hands-on administrative business, commonly lived within the town walls or in the vicinity of the town center.⁷ Even during the modern period, the town center served as the foothold of colonial power, around which colonial rule and modern changes concentrated, while the farming district was relatively distant from them as the “early modern” elites and dominant culture persisted with a firm presence. By sharply capturing the heterogeneity and unevenness between the town center and farming district that were embedded in local communities, Itagaki provides an analytical framework that explains the “spatial dynamics surrounding the colonial experience” (37).

Construction of the Book and Central Content

In Itagaki’s own words, in this book, he “insisted on maintaining a consistent perspective toward one object, while using a method similar to aiming and thrusting a camera tenaciously from various angles” (20). Itagaki did not organize the chapters in chronological order; rather, the book is constructed such that things are “described from the substructure up to the superstructure” (20). The first chapter deals with the time and space of the early modern and chapters 2–5 deal with those of the modern.

The first chapter, titled “The Social Dynamics of Sangju,” surveys the conditions constituting the “early modern” community in Sangju by looking at town chronicles, historical materials on or from local Confucian education institutions such as *sŏwŏn* and *sŏdang*, and historical records from local clans. Itagaki examines the basic conditions of the town community and apprehends the positions of aristocrats and local clerks dynamically, which in turn leads to an exploration of how the social relations formed in the early modern period were transformed in the late nineteenth century. This is not just to portray the prehistory of what came before the modern, but to provide a premise for understanding the “early modern,” which is discussed in the following chapters.

The second chapter, “Colonization and the Modern Society of Sangju,” presents the modes of transformation by which the local community changed from early modern to modern in the political and economic spheres. It discusses the effects of the colonial administration and influx of Japanese population on the local community. Additionally, Itagaki examines the mode of transformation that the town center underwent as it became more modernized and urbanized as a downtown. Finally, he looks at the deployment of commercial agriculture on the town level, which includes both the town center and farming district, through the changes imposed on silkworm farming and the brewing industry in Korea.

Chapter 3, “Local Elites and Political Space,” is an analysis of the transformation of local elites during the colonial period. The underlying question in this chapter is, in Itagaki’s words: “How did the ‘premodern’ local elites, namely the aristocrats [*sajok*] and local clerks [*ijok*], maintain or transform themselves as they were faced with the modern world? And what type of new elites emerge in the modern period?” Itagaki pays attention to the “modern” local elites that came into prominence during the colonial period, such as community influencers or youth. Yet he also continues to trace the complex mode in which they intersected or became entangled with the networks and activities of “early modern” elite groups of aristocrats and local clerks, whose presence and influence still strongly persisted.

Chapter 4, “New Schools in the Local Community,” starts from the question of education—that is, how literacy in classical Chinese, which had been the intellectual basis of the “early modern” local elites, either persisted or changed, and what the new school system meant, or what kind of role it played in the local community. Itagaki then investigates the changes in elementary education that took place during the colonial period. The public school system introduced by the Government-General competed and coexisted with “early modern” educational institutions, such as *sodang*, or unofficial academic meetings and lectures that existed outside the institutionalized education system until they eventually became hegemonic. Itagaki closely follows this process in this chapter.

Chapter 5, “Colonial Experience Seen through a Personal Journal,” reviews the everyday experiences of living in the colonial society through a journal kept by a young farmer in the 1930s. By observing the consumer behavior of the journal’s author, Itagaki paints a portrait of a young man in the farming community who is oscillating between the new and the old; the man’s social perception is tracked by the way he perceives the urban and rural communities, the Korean nation (*minjok*), and Japan.

In the book's conclusion, the modes and meanings of the aforementioned analyses of different aspects of colonial Korea are once again summarized within the frameworks of articulation of "modern" and "early modern" and the heterogeneity of "modern." Finally, Itagaki presents the implications and vision of this research.

On Its Remarkable Achievement

Itagaki's book is a rare piece of research that I find particularly remarkable for its incredible elaboration, sharp critical perspective, fresh approach, and tenacious and consistent maintenance of the analytical framework throughout the book. My approach and research method are similar to Itagaki's, and I have proposed the concept of "order of traditional authority" to describe "the continuity and transformation of the 'early modern' in modern Korea" that he mentions (Lee Y. 2009).⁸ Hence, I feel an intellectual camaraderie with the author, who must have struggled to conduct fieldwork in the local area and rummage through fragmented materials; moreover, I must confess that I was intellectually stimulated by and received suggestions from his theoretical framework and rich descriptions so that I feel I have made a new breakthrough. I will go on to explain the book's achievement on two levels—methodology and content.

Itagaki conducted fieldwork in the Sangju area located in Kyōngsang North Province for almost two years, from December 1999 through September 2001. Studying local history in Korea can prove quite challenging due to the notorious lack of material. However, he managed to uncover an extensive range of texts, including government records, official publications, local materials, materials from the local clans, and the aforementioned personal journal. He does acknowledge that, even though he was prepared for the adverse conditions, the lack of materials was worse than he had imagined (19). Also, in order to overcome the limitations of fragmented historical materials that one inevitably faces when researching local history, he made good use of interviews and historical imagination.

Itagaki utilizes his anthropological background and tries to "look at diverse aspects of things without picking and choosing the object selectively, even though it may be reckless" (22). In other words, he attempts to "portray an area in a multifaceted manner" (22). He calls his research "historical ethnography," in that such a "holistic" approach is something that, on the one hand, goes beyond "the frameworks of classic fieldwork and ethnography, which have become a norm in anthropology since anthropologist Bronislaw Kasper Malinowski established them," and, on the other, maintains a critical position vis-à-vis the colonialism

and ahistoricism that could be embedded in classic anthropology (20–23). In addition, using his anthropological training to full advantage, he maintains the “internal perspective” of looking “from inside the local area,” instead of looking “at the local area” (21). He also utilizes microhistory to its fullest, which allows him to view the whole through a small window. He analyzes the local area, Sangju in particular, and observes individuals from the position of local resident and concerned party, rather than from the position of the state or outsider. He sees the local area and individuals neither as miniature extensions of the state, nor as isolated microcosms completely unrelated to the macroscopic world. Instead, he tries to connect the microscopic to the macroscopic. In particular, by approaching history through everyday life by examining the farmer’s personal journal, he does not commit the common error of excluding “something that is quotidian or ordinary”; instead, he examines “the everyday life” of “ordinary people” in colonial society within the context of quotidian and ordinary things. In sum, Itagaki’s approach is nearly unprecedented, in that he provides a thick description of the colonial experience in Sangju, Kyōngsang North Province, based on a holistic, internal, and microscopic approach by means of a long period of fieldwork and rich analyses of textual materials.

What is most outstanding about this book in terms of its content is that it evinces that there is a continuation and transformation of, or variation of, the “early modern” in modern Korea. Temporal continuity between the early modern and the modern may have been taken for granted by scholars thus far, but it has not necessarily been verified academically; and it is the actual mode of this continuity that Itagaki finally elucidates systematically. He also posits the difference between the town center and farming district—in other words, the spatial heterogeneity of the “modern” as an important subject that has often been overlooked, even by Korean scholars. He then gives a dynamic analysis of the multilayered experience of the modern in Korea by connecting spatial issues to the temporal axis, which is the articulation of “early modern” and “modern.” Furthermore, he examines the different positions of the colonizer (Japanese) and the colonized (Korean); uneven relation to the colonial power; and the perception of coloniality in the given period, which leads to revealing the unevenness of the experience of “modernity” in colonial Korea. In this way, he is able to take a step closer to a historical understanding of “coloniality,” which is still treated rather ambiguously in colonial modernity theory. In sum, Itagaki’s book is a monumental piece of work that opens up a new horizon in discussions of colonial modernity by tracing the dynamics of multilayered time and space.

Critical Comments

I am mostly in agreement with and have learned a great deal from Itagaki's interpretation and arguments, but in the interest of pushing him to improve and advance his research even further, I offer a few critical comments here. Itagaki states that his research grew out of his attention to education, which he treats in chapter 4 of his book. However, what intrigued me most was the issue he deals with in chapter 3: local elites and local politics. Hence, focusing on chapter 3, I address the issue of the articulation of "early modern" and "modern," which is the main thread running through this book. As for the other chapters, I point out some parts that seem insufficient in terms of content and finally make a comment on the author's theoretical framework.

Most importantly, the relationship between "early modern" local elites (aristocrats and local clerks) and "modern" local elites (local influencers and youth) is rather ambiguous. In chapter 3, Itagaki depicts the mode in which the "early modern" elites from the families of aristocrats and local clerks maintained "early modern" networks and activities, while both being in conflict with the "modern" elites and, to an extent, overlapping with them. Through this depiction, the persistence and transformation of the "early modern" in the modern period is corroborated. However, Itagaki's analysis is insufficient in distinguishing the internal differences that existed *among* the "early modern" or "modern" elites. Among the "modern" elites, some may have had "early modern" features, while others were completely unassociated with them; moreover, there must have been some difference even among the "early modern" elites, depending on their familial background as aristocrats or clerks. Additionally, "modern" local elites are described as local influencers and youth, yet it is unclear from Itagaki's analysis whether these are overlapping, distinct, or conflicting categories—or, if any distinction exists between the two, whether that difference is related to the "early modern" or not.

In my opinion, these ambiguities stem from three sources. The first is Itagaki's inattention to the personal information of the numerous local elites that are the subject of chapter 3, particularly their origin and ancestry in terms of clan and region. Because of this lack of systematic analysis, it is difficult to apprehend the internal differences among the local elites who were involved in diverse organizations and activities during the colonial period and to find the genealogical connection with the "early modern." Second, these ambiguities derive from the fact that—as Ji Su-Gol (2015), another scholar who has commented on this book, points out—Itagaki does not pay much attention to the internal

differences among the “modern” local elites.⁹ In fact, when analyzing the conflicting axes of local politics, Itagaki states that he will focus not so much on the differences and contradictions among the local elites as on the conflicts between Koreans and Japanese and the contradictions between “early modern” and “modern” local elites (250). I, however, would have found his study more insightful if he had examined the differences that existed among the “modern” local elites and traced their connection to the “early modern” in explaining the articulation of “early modern” and “modern” that is set up as his theoretical framework. Finally, Itagaki’s analysis of local elites fails to connect the spatial axis of town center and farming district and the temporal axis of “early modern” and “modern.” As he recognizes, the town center and the farming district were not only spatially uneven but also historically heterogeneous, in that the town center was the stronghold for local clerks and the farming district was the stronghold for aristocrats. Yet in his analysis of local elites, he interprets the difference between town center and farming district merely as spatial unevenness, and hence displays the limitations of failing to expand his analytical view to encompass the differences among the “early modern” local elites in relation to spatial difference. Let me elaborate on this point in greater detail.

The characteristics of the “town center” must be addressed first. The town center was the stronghold for local government in the Chosŏn, the area in which local clerks, the working-level administrators, resided and based their activities. Additionally, it was the space where institutions such as *hyangch’ŏng* (local agencies) or *hyanggyo* (government-run provincial schools) were located, in which local self-government at the town-wide level was discussed by the aristocrats who mostly resided in the farming district; in other words, it was also a passage through which the group residing in the farming district could move beyond its base to connect to the town as a whole or to the bigger world outside of the town. Ultimately, two spaces intersected in the town center—the first contained the activities of those whose power was based in the area; the other was a bridgehead for the group whose base was in the farming district but who wanted to expand their influence to the town as a whole. For this reason, a wide variety of activities that took place in the town center could not necessarily be attributed to the group based there alone. Yet Itagaki seems to confuse this dynamic.

By and large, social movements developed in the town center among the youth based there in the early 1920s, but by the mid-1920s their influence had expanded to the whole town, both in name and reality (Lee K. 2011). Itagaki also points out that social movements based in the town center spread out to and connected with the farming district in the late

1920s through the activities of Singanhoe, one of the nationalist organizations during the Japanese occupation. In my view, however, social movements expanding from the town center to the entire town should be seen not so much as the energy of the center (town center) dispersing to the periphery (farming district) but as two separate lines of activities based in the town center and farming district, respectively, starting to compete against, collide with, and join together as the influence of the two groups gradually expanded to the whole town. The separate lines—namely, that of local clerks whose stronghold was the town center and that of aristocrats whose foothold was the farming district—also got involved in this process (Lee Y. 2014a). Therefore, the diverse activities taking place in the town center were primarily those of the local clerks, but also contained the complex mode in which the energy of aristocrats based in the farming district competed and combined with that of the clerks.¹⁰

In fact, Itagaki's book reveals a number of cases in which aristocrats and local clerks took quite different historical paths, although they are categorized as the same "early modern" local elites. Although Itagaki himself did not systematize them manifestly, based on what personal information he provided, they can roughly be organized as follows: in the modern period, some aristocrats settled for "early modern" networks and were either absorbed in the system or closed themselves up; others played major roles in diverse activities, including the Righteous Army movement in the late Chosŏn, the movement promoting the establishment of schools, the March 1st Movement in 1919, and various other social movements and nationalist movements during the 1920s and 1930s.

On the other hand, local clerks did not engage in the Righteous Army or school establishment movements, although they were the ones who suffered the most from the reorganization of local institutions during Korea's protectorate period. Nor did they show special signs of resistance prior to the March 1st Movement. They jumped into social movements in the early 1920s but were mostly excluded in the innovation process during the mid-1920s. In the late 1920s, local clerks participated in the Singanhoe activities, but subsequently they tended to be absorbed into the system. Roughly three incidents or periods in which solidarity between clerks and aristocrats became particularly prominent in social or national movements can be named: (1) the Tonghak Peasant Revolution, when their common status as the ruling class was being seriously threatened; (2) the early 1920s, when they were infused with the hope of new political space opening up as an effect of the March 1st Movement; and (3) the period of the independence movement pushed forth by Singanhoe, when people were seeking a national united front.

However, conflicts and differences, rather than solidarity, became more prominent between the two groups from the late Chosŏn to the 1910s, when oppression by the Japanese empire was most severe; in the mid-1920s, when the youth organization was innovating and socialist activities were being reinforced; and in the early 1930s, when revolutionary popular movements were strong. In my opinion, there were considerable differences between those from an aristocratic background versus those from a local clerk background, and those differences posed a significant problem for both groups, in that each group held a different position and relationship toward colonial modernity.¹¹ Therefore, this issue is significant for understanding colonial modernity and also has important implications surrounding discussions of agents and leading forces during the period of transition into the modern.¹²

In addition to these comments about chapter 3, I would like to make several specific points about the other chapters.

The significance of chapters 1 and 2 is that they lay out the premise for discussion. Yet it seems odd that Itagaki discusses silkworm farming and brewing but fails to address the mode of and change in peasant farming, which was the socioeconomic basis of the “early modern” society, when discussing the economic changes in the local community. The continuation of peasant farming was likely one of the primary reasons why the “early modern” persisted during the modern period. Also, during the process of reorganization due to farmland reform in the 1950s, the “early modern” (what I call the “traditional authority order”) acted as an important variable (Lee Y. 2014b). For these reasons, I find it regrettable that this book did not cover the continuation and transformation of peasant farming.

In chapter 4, Itagaki addresses the complex mode in which “early modern” education was entangled with the new school system during the colonial period. Yet I feel that he should have inquired more deeply into the significance of those two axes coexisting, rather than stopping at merely describing the phenomenon. Why did Koreans maintain *sŏdang*, a form of traditional education that perpetuated classical Chinese learning even after they accepted the new school system? Major aristocratic families continued their education in *sŏdang* while at the same time establishing new “modern” schools—could this mean that there was a divergence within the aristocracy, or was it a dual-track strategy adopted by the aristocrats? And why did the local clerks not participate in these activities? It was presumably the aristocrats’ intent to maintain the “early modern” through classical Chinese education and Confucian learning that fueled the perpetuation of *sŏdang* education, yet this obsession with

the “early modern” and its relation to the aspiration for the “modern” is not clarified in this book, an issue I hope to see Itagaki unravel someday.

Chapter 5 shows an impressive and fresh attempt to analyze colonial experience through a personal journal. However, in order for the colonial experience of the journal’s author to be elucidated, the time and locale ought to have been defined more concretely. The author of the journal, called “S.,” was a medium-scale independent landowner from a commoners’ village near the town center. He was far from being an “early modern” local elite and thus had the potential to accept the “modern” with ease. To cast off the issue of representativeness (or lack thereof), which is often raised in microhistory, Itagaki should have more clearly laid out these characteristics before making his arguments. Additionally, S. started to suffer from depression in 1932. Itagaki keenly picks up on this and views S.’s depression not just on a personal level, but as something that represents the Koreans colonial experience, which Itagaki figuratively refers to as “the colonial depression.” Yet the period in which S. started to suffer from depression also coincided with the stabilization of farming villages by the Government-General and the implementation of privatization on a serious level. In that sense, although it is possible to attribute S.’s depression to “the colonial depression,” in a stricter sense it could also be a specific, historical kind of depression, occurring when the vitality of 1920s that began to form after the March 1st Movement was sapped and the colonial society began being absorbed into the system. Along these lines, it is particularly regrettable that Itagaki did not discuss what path S. went down after Korea’s independence.

Finally, I wish Itagaki had more systematically theorized the interesting concepts of “early modern” and “modern” that he presents in the book. I think that the persistence of the “early modern” into the modern period must be addressed more fully. Specifically, was this persistence a mere residue or delay that was destined to disappear naturally? If not, what were the driving force and basis for this persistence, and how did the condition of “colony” play into it? It also would have been helpful to explain whether the continuation of the “early modern” was a distinct feature that only arose in colonies, or a general phenomenon that only manifested itself in a particular mode under colonial circumstances, such as Chosŏn. I hope to see Itagaki address these issues with more clarity in his future work, thus contributing even more to the advancement of colonial modernity theory than he already has with this current book.

Yong-ki Lee is assistant professor of History of Education at Korea National University of Education.

Notes

- 1 Among the articles written by a number of scholars to summarize these three different paradigms of Korean modern historical studies, those representing each position are as follows: for the internal development theory, Chung Youn-Tae (1999) and Lee Seung Ryul (2007); for colonial modernization theory, Ahn Byung-Jik (1997) and Kim Nak Nyeon (2007); and for colonial modernity theory, Bae Sungjoon (2000) and Cho Hyung Keun (2009).
- 2 Bae Hang-seob conceptualizes the otherization and colonization of the premodern by the modern as “modern-centrism,” just as the otherization and colonization of the non-West by the West is referred to as Western-centrism. He views that modern-centrism is an intellectual system that filters and infuses the premodern into the consciousness of modern people and an ideology that controls, reconstructs, and suppresses the premodern while implanting the fantasies of the modern (Miyazima and Bae 2015, 10–11).
- 3 “Men make their own history, but not of their own free will; not under circumstances they themselves have chosen but under the given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted” (Marx 1974).
- 4 Itagaki introduces the term *kŭnse* (early modern) and draws a clear line that it is neither to be considered as a mere negation of the modern (*pikŭndae*), nor as a passive concept that only points to the temporal precedence to the modern (*chŏnkŭndae*, or premodern). Nor should it be confused with the ahistoric notion of “tradition.” He introduces the term *kŭnse* to underscore the historical dynamics that existed before colonization occurred.
- 5 Miyazima Hiroshi veers away from Western-centered development theory and focuses on the fact that East Asian nations such as Korea, Japan, and China followed different historical trajectories from those of European nations. Nowadays, he even steps away from the concept of “early modern” and has coined the term, “Confucian modern(ity)” to conceptualize the idea.
- 6 Itagaki accepts the notion of “contemporariness” and “stages” suggested by Matsumoto Takenori (2005) to a certain extent, but seems to be disagreeing with Matsumoto’s view of popular culture and disciplinary power being established as hegemonic among colonial Koreans.
- 7 For the ruling class of the Chosŏn to live on the outskirts instead of in the town center is one of the central characteristics of early modern Korea. Probably because Koreans are so familiar with this phenomenon, it seems like it has not been properly treated as the subject of intellectual analysis. The ruling class, unequipped with military power, living among the commoners without any physical barrier like a castle wall separating them suggests that the rule of aristocrats (*yangban*) was hegemonic in nature in the Chosŏn. The meaning of this phenomenon should be addressed and interpreted through comparative historical analyses in the future.
- 8 What I mean by the “traditional authority order” is a concept that points to the hierarchical system of authority and power relations that are constructed in multi-layers based on rank and blood ties in the aristocratic society of the late Chosŏn. By the modern period, the traditional authority order had become isolated from the actual

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- power structure; in reality, however, the reputation and authority from the past were perpetually reaffirmed in the name of “tradition” and were utilized as a symbolic political resource on the noninstitutional level. Hence, even in the modern period, the traditional authority order was not just some state of the past, but operated as the real power of the time.
- 9 Although I empathize with Ji Su-Gol’s remark, I do think differently from him on a few issues. First, Ji argues that local elites during the colonial period can be clearly divided as the conservative “local influential” and progressive “innovative youth,” and that they were essentially in a contesting relationship. On this issue, I agree with Itagaki and think that they had fluid boundaries, which could overlap at times. Also, Ji comments that it is awkward and unnatural to underscore the origin and ancestry of aristocrats or local clerks, as the creation of local elites during the colonial period was completely dissociated from “past social standing.” Yet, I would criticize Itagaki for not discerning and considering these differences more thoroughly.
- 10 The aristocrats or landowners who used to reside in the farming district started to move to the city or town center where face-to-face interactions with the common farmers were scarce during the 1920s when the social conflicts were aggravated due to the agricultural depression (Matsumoto 1988, 86). This move retained the character of creating a bridgehead to the town center, in order not to be tightly bound to the farming district or launch into the bigger world more aggressively, while maintaining strong ties to the farming district as their base.
- 11 It is likely that people in colonial Chosŏn displayed genealogical differences in their response to the colonial power or modern changes based on their affiliations. Aristocrats, who were based in farming districts, had the room to be relatively behind or assume a defiant attitude towards the “modern” that the colonial power attempted to implant. On the other hand, local clerks were relatively adaptive and accepting to the colonial power and modern changes due to the character of residing in the town center and their existing roles as the staff in charge of the hands-on administrative business. This is something that should be addressed in more depth in the studies of local history in modern Korea, but the tendency to study local communities during the period of transition into the modern period premised on the conflicts between local clerks (the town center-based group) and aristocrats (the farming district-based group) is growing stronger (Jung 2004; Lee Y. 2014a). To elaborate, in Andong area, which is commonly recognized as the stronghold of aristocratic culture in Korea, socialist movements were intense and their primary agents were mostly young men from renowned aristocratic families (Cho D. 2002; Shim 2004).
- 12 This is not to say that commoners, who were affiliated neither with the aristocratic families nor with those of the clerks, were not part of the leading forces and primary agents during the period of transition into the modern. Yet, many case studies show that the leading forces of the early modern period were composed of the people who were not completely unrelated to what Itagaki referred to as the “early modern” local elites.

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