Book Notes


Like comets, singular works of scholarship sometimes have long tails. One example is Benedict Anderson's Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. Another is The Invention of Tradition, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. That volume complemented Anderson's analysis of the invention, proliferation and variation of nationalism with accounts of the fabrication of other more circumscribed "traditions," which themselves also contributed to the elaboration, dissemination, persuasiveness, reception and acceptance of the more comprehensive and historically dispositive (political) constructions of national identities, the history of which Anderson limned. "[T]he idea of 'the nation', after all, stands as the mega invented tradition of the modern era."¹

Among the progeny of Anderson, Hobsbawm and Ranger, special mention should be made in this context of Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan — not the only nor even the first, but a conceptually suggestive, topically varied and thematically coherent account of the phenomenon of the "invention" (and "re-invention") of "tradition" in a geo-historically specific East Asian setting. Although not identified by Laurel Kendall in her editorial introduction as one of its aims, Consuming Korean Tradition in Early and Late Modernity: Commodification, Tourism, and Performance might be considered as trying to do for the field of Korean Studies what Mirror of Modernity did

for Japanese Studies. In this, at least in regards to the breadth of its coverage, it starts off well on a path to success.

*Consuming Korean Tradition* is organized topically, rather than chronologically. Individual essays are collected into the subject categories of “sight,” “material objects,” “tourism” and “performance.” Individual chapters deal with: colonial-era department stores; modern mixed shopping, hotel, entertainment and cultural centers; colonial cultural tourism; traditional ritual objects transformed into historically-disenfranchised cultural heritage *objets d’art*; food; dance; and music.

One broad theme underlying this classificatory scheme is that “invented” “tradition,” whatever the contours of its obvious intended meaning and its status and difficulties as a discursive concept, is not simply a matter of “thought,” but of ostensibly more primary sensations or experiences “embodied” in sensate forms that leave especially lasting impressions, because of their visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory and/or tactile impact and/or performative (re-)enactment. The philosophical naiveté of such purported distinction between “thought” and “sensation” is surprising. But the apparent intention is unobjectionable enough. Perhaps the point for which it strives is best illustrated by the Korean Folk Village (*Minsokch’on*). *Minsokch’on* aims to immerse visitors synesthetically, including especially in performative (re-) enactments of allegedly traditional everyday life, in all aspects of a totalizing ersatz imaginary of an ostensibly singular “Korean” “tradition” assembled out of a farrago of culturally distinguishable customs and objects from geographically and culturally distinct parts of the peninsula. *Minsokch’on* is not treated in any of the essays included in this volume. But the miniaturized version of a Korean folk village included in the Folk Museum (*Minsok Pangmulguan*) at Seoul’s Lotte World is. Lotte World’s miniature folk village is the most interesting and thematically pertinent of the *foci* of this volume’s chapter on Lotte World’s peculiar blend of shopping center, amusement park, hotel and cultural space by Timothy Tangherlini, who previously has dealt more substantially elsewhere with the full-size, full-on version at Suwon.

The essays in *Consuming Korean Tradition* also highlight certain other large themes that are illustrated across its chosen topical categories and/or are asserted to have been given specifically, and particularly resonant, “Korean” inflection(s). Among these, the most salient is the binary character of “modernity” and “tradition” and, specifically, the relationship and the mutual shaping of “modernity” and “tradition” forged by emerging patterns of production and consumption under conditions of capitalist economic organization and development. Katarzyna J. Cwiertka and Hyung Il Pai’s
essays, on the introduction and development of department stores in Korea and on the production of tourist images of Korea as part of the newly burgeoning travel industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, respectively, are particularly revealing in this connection.

Cwiertka describes the palpable manner in which (some privileged) Koreans became directly physically enmeshed in "modernity" by their transitory occupation of the spaces of new department stores, including especially their opulent dining facilities, which were created in Korea in the early 20th century; there they could consume exotic foreign foods, after "eye-shopping" in stores defined as spectacularly and iconically "modern" both by the technology and design of their architecture and the style of their ever-changing interior decoration schemes. Nicely illustrating the mutually interpenetrating conditionality of "modernity" and "tradition," Cwiertka notes the department stores' featuring of exoticized presentations of the traditions of putatively archaic peoples as part of merchandising campaigns mounted in studiedly modern settings for the sale of thoroughly modern products.

Pai similarly sketches how tourism and tourism promotion created and reified an imaginary of "Korean" "tradition" outside of modern space and time, (paradoxically) available to be visited as an archaic remnant in the current world, but (ironically) emptied of any "modally authentic historical"\(^2\) content by virtue of an essentializing impulse. Essays in this volume by Okpyo Moon and Robert Oppenheim on Confucian lineage house tourism and homestays and other species of local heritage and overseas tourism organized as cultural "field studies," respectively, describe the same problematic of the authenticity of "tradition" under modern conditions of preservation and consumption in other contexts.

Cwiertka, Pai, Moon, Kendall (in her article on traditional Korean totems) and Kyung-Koo Han (in an essay on the apotheosis of kimchi as a badge of national identity), also allude to the fashion in which these intermeshed worlds of "modernity" and "tradition" were made available not just for a fleeting sensuous experience, but for continued enjoyment (and entrapment). Through the purchase and consumption of modern, usually foreign and often Western, food and goods with which such colonial department stores were stocked, and of the promotional paraphernalia, such as travel posters, travel photography, guidebooks, postcards, etc., and souvenirs, the distribution of which accompanied

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the growth of travel tourism, consumers and tourists were schooled in the fetishization of images and commodities that were produced utilizing elements of the same new industrial technologies upon which modern transportation systems, and the products they were built to distribute, were based. Kendall similarly illustrates how items of traditional material/spiritual culture – Korea’s unique Changsiung totems – were transformed from ritual objects to curios to vehicles of individual expression and cultural allegiance – the fetishization of a fetish as a commodity.

This volume also aspires to call attention to the ostensibly unique “Korean” character that this dynamic interaction of “modernity” and “tradition,” and the production and consumption of each, took on in the Korean peninsula. The elephant in this living room, of course, is Japanese colonialism. As Pai’s article strongly suggests, the construction of both Korean “modernity” and “Korean” “tradition” were arguably only effectively initiated and, in any event, over time powerfully, increasingly and dispositively shaped by a Japanese agenda as Japan wrested and exercised de facto, and later de jure, executive control over the aims, agenda, pace, nature, shape and course of Korean “modernization” and the concomitant invention of “Korean” “tradition.”

That is not to say, as some apologists for Japanese and other foreign imperialisms would have had it, that Korea and Koreans were mere hapless objects of enlightened and improving foreign altruism. Although often marginalized and compelled to challenge incipient or full-blown hegemonic interpretations of what was “Korean” imposed by largely self-interested foreigners, Koreans were active participants and contestants in both Korean modernization and the invention of Korean tradition. Cwiertka references the colonial-era Korean department store entrepreneur Pak Hŭng-Sik and his Chongno District Hwasin emporium, the floor space of which was the largest in Korea, greater than that of any of its Japanese competitors. And Judy Van Zile provides a satisfyingly detailed account of the life and career of the dancer Ch’oe Sŭng Hŭi and her efforts to forge, within the constraints of Japanese colonialism, an artistic career that melded her Korean heritage and her (Japanese) training in Western ballet and modern dance.

One other claim of this volume is that Koreans’ pervasive and still-burgeoning “late twentieth century middle-class nostalgia for a vanished village world as desire for an imagined cultural authenticity in the face of seemingly pervasive Westernization” is distinguishable from that of other ethnie, because Koreans experienced “early modernity as colonial modernity crafted in and through the Japanese Empire,” and its “rural past was not so much ‘lost’ as taken away by someone else.” Moreover, a later “independent South Korea
subsequently industrialized under a cold-war military dictatorship with a draconian transformation of urban and rural life that critics now describe as slavish Westernization."

As characterizations of certain Korean realities, such generalizations have a degree of accuracy commensurate with their level of abstraction. But this is where the explanatory approach of the *Consuming Korean Tradition* mis-steps. Korea simply is not the only place to have experienced modernization as a theft of a putatively pre-existing traditional collective identity under colonial domination or authoritarian developmental dictatorship. And reducing Koreans' experiences to the status of (mere) exemplars of "theories" of purportedly more general import, such as "modernization," derogates precisely the specifically Korean character of the experiences of modernization and the uniquely Korean contributions to the construction of "Korean" traditions that this volume purports to want to recover.

The inadequacy of this approach to comprehend and communicate the unique character of the interplay of tradition and modernization on the Korean peninsula stems, in part, from its generally a-temporal perspective. In fact, the a-historicity of the volume as a whole belies its title references to "early" and "late" modernity: neither term is even briefly defined; there is no effort to describe, or any reference to any informative account of, the emergence of the former in Korea or the passage therefrom to the latter; few of the individual essays make much use of the periodization the ideas convey; so, no satisfactorily presented interpretive historical context for the book's essays is ready to hand.

This weakness is compounded by the absence of any convincing effort to relate the overall emphases of the book on "commodification" and "consumption," and the specific themes of its individual essays, to the larger issues put into play by Anderson and his progeny, *i.e.*, the role of such invented subsidiary traditions in the fabrication of the mega-tradition of the nation, its reification in the state and the ongoing political contestation thereof. These more general themes are barely suggested in this volume by Keith Howard's otherwise interesting final account of the politicization and artistic turmoil attendant on state subsidization of Korean traditional music.

The strengths of this book are in the richness of some of its individual contributions. It would have been stronger with a convincingly presented "theoretical" or interpretive framework, specifically with a historical dimension—certainly something other than the fashionable "theoretical" shibboleths it does desultorily incant. It would have been especially useful if the telling detail and nuances that some of the essays present were woven into a modally authentic diachronic, and "thick," description of the fabrication of imaginaries of
national identity and their political instantiation and contestation in Korea—one that forthrightly took on, sought to modify significantly or even to fill in the existing stories of the construction of the mutually conditioned and reinforcing imaginaries of Korean tradition, modernity and identity in a manner pertinent to Anderson’s still persuasive “paradigm.”

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I should begin this review by declaring a certain conflict of interest, because Soldiers on the Cultural Front is being billed by its publisher as a “corrective” to one of my own efforts. Had I disliked Ms Gabroussenko’s book, I would have passed on reviewing it altogether. Fortunately, I can recommend it so strongly that no-one will accuse me of a breach of ethics. Simply put, Soldiers on the Cultural Front is one of the best books on North Korea to appear in recent years. On the one hand it is a great contribution to that country’s literary history, and a vitally important book on that count alone. This is, after all, one of the most under-researched areas in North Korean studies, despite the vital importance of literature to a propaganda apparatus that dominates life in that country. Soldiers is only the second full-length book on the subject to have been published in the West, the first one, my Han Sorya and North Korean Literature (Cornell East Asia Series), having appeared a full seventeen years ago.

Ms Gabroussenko’s book is also, however, a remarkably immediate and lively account of intellectual life in North Korea from 1945 to 1960. The author is a native Russian speaker, which makes her both especially interested in the Soviet influence on North Korean culture and especially well-qualified to research it. While preparing the book, Ms Gabroussenko interviewed such “living witnesses to and immediate participants in the events described” as Chŏng Ryul, North Korea’s deputy minister of culture from 1952 to 1955, who now resides in Kazakhstan; and Cho Yurii, son of the famous Soviet-Korean poet Cho Kich’ŏn and now a resident of Moscow. Had this book not
been written, the testimony of these sources would likely have been lost forever.

Soldiers on the Cultural Front is divided into five chapters. Each of the three chapters that make up the core of the book is given over to the biography and analysis of a representative writer: the afore-mentioned poet Cho Kich’ŏn, the novelist Yi Kiyŏng, and the novelist Yi T’aejun. Mercifully, Gabroussenko does not presuppose our familiarity with the works under discussion, which are instead summarized and quoted from in efficient translation. Any readers expecting to be introduced to overlooked gems of North Korean literature will be disappointed. “Again today you smiled purely,” Cho writes in one of his poems, “And said that you have surpassed the production plan threefold:” much of the three featured writers’ work is on this level. It only looks good when compared to the even worse literature that followed the North’s cultural revolution of the mid-1960s, when the personality cult took over almost entirely.

My favorite chapter is the one devoted to Yi T’aejun, perhaps because “Korea’s Guy de Maupassant,” as the North Korean media flatteringly called him until his fall from grace, was such an unlikely addition to the Pyongyang cultural scene. Although his autobiographical novella “Around the Time of Liberation” (Haebang chŏnbu, 1946) is no masterpiece, it reflects a remarkably honest intellect of a kind that was bound to come to grief under the Kim Il Sung dictatorship. (Everyone who has swallowed the modern myth of a Korea united in joy at Japan’s defeat should read Yi T’aejun’s account of how a crowded rural bus responds to the news.) Gabroussenko’s discussion of the writer’s purge after the war makes for poignant reading. One of the critics so fittingly described in the book as “political executioners” attacked Yi for likening American cannons in a story to a shining moon – which is just the sort of fresh and vivid metaphor that North Korean literature could have used more of. I discussed some of the same purges and factional clashes in my own book in 1994, but Gabroussenko’s greater access to North Korean materials and to living sources makes her account far more vivid and informative.

The only part of the book with which I take serious issue is – predictably enough, I suppose – its assertion that I was wrong in my first book to describe socialist realism as having failed in the DPRK. My argument was that North Korean literature neither reflects Marxist-Leninism nor fulfills the clear and rigid postulates of socialist realism as defined in the Stalin-era USSR ("the positive hero," for example), ergo it is not socialist realist in the true sense of the term. But instead of directly countering my assertion in its own terms, Ms Gabroussenko reaches for the much looser and more flexible definition of socialist realism that emerged in the USSR in the 1960s. This is just not on. For
one thing, whatever Mikhail Sholokhov said about the official doctrine in his Nobel Speech in 1965 has nothing to do with the earlier period in North Korea that Ms Gabroussenko and I discuss in our respective books. Secondly, most cultural historians in Russia and the West agree that by the 1960s, Soviet socialist realism as we know it had effectively ceased to exist. I therefore stand fully by the assertion I made in 1994, and see nothing in *Soldiers on the Cultural Front* that contradicts it.

This is not a major complaint, however, because Ms Gabroussenko’s book does not deal with issues of Soviet aesthetics at such great length anyway. *Soldiers* has more of a biographical and historical focus. This will make it far more accessible to a new generation of university students for whom the term socialist realism means nothing to begin with. I recommend the book especially strongly to professors who have to teach a course in the twentieth-century literature of the entire peninsula. Any of Ms Gabroussenko’s three biographical chapters in itself would, if assigned as homework for example, give students a quicker and more memorable introduction to North Korean literary history than they are likely to find elsewhere. I only wish that *Soldiers on the Cultural Front* had been titled, sub-titled and packaged with more than just the academic market in mind. With its strong “human interest” element and smooth, jargon-free prose, it might well appeal to some of the same layman readers who snapped up Barbara Demick’s *Nothing to Envy* last year.

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Tikhonov’s text is an attempt to show the implantation of ideas on Social Darwinism in Korea and to then trace the development of these ideas through the 1880s to 1910s. He suggests that the decay of Neo-Confucianism created a fertile environment for the reception of these ideas (12-13), but asserts that its influence was among a small group of elite scholars. In the introduction he provides us with an accurate summary of the text’s shortcomings, describing its “lopsided focus upon a few privileged voices” due to “the paucity of sources”
(19). Nevertheless, he proceeds with painstaking detail to show that certain elite members were influenced by Social Darwinism.

Tikhonov outlines how Yu Kiljun (of the Kabo reforms fame) and Yun Ch’iho (independence activist) learned about Social Darwinism through Japanese and American sources: he suggests that the latter attempted to fuse the Protestant belief in “God’s elect” with Darwinism’s belief in “survival of the fittest.” He then proceeds to depict how these ideas began to be disseminated in Korea via the Tongnip Simmun (The Independent) by Yun Ch’iho and Sŏ Chaep’il, though its readership was hardly tremendous. Sŏ Chaep’il and his associates, while acknowledging the growing precariousness of Korea’s position in relation to the Japanese, seem to have adapted a strong belief in “Korea’s chances to become ‘fittest’ and ‘survive’ [as] comparatively high” (59). Such ideas, Tikhonov argues, influenced the nationalist An Ch’angho, member of the Independence Club, another Christian.

In Chapter Four we discover how the ideas of the Chinese patriotic reformer, Liang Qichao (1873-1929), made available (through translation) in different newspapers in Korea which sprang up in the early 1900s, encouraged people to fight for the “survival” of the state, motivating early Korean nationalists. Confucianism, while upheld by some as a reflection of “Koreaness” (95), was rejected by others for having “emasculated” the country’s past military prowess (97). Tikhonov argues that these ideas motivated Sin Ch’aeho to reinvigorate Korea’s lagging military prowess and to promote physical/military education while Christianity and “the West” were seen as civilizing forces, for which Europe’s international reputation was considered as evidence. He discusses the Buddhist Han Yong’un, who draws on the ideas of Liang Qichao, to show Buddhism’s superiority over other religions and its “high evolutionary potential” (130). However, he also concludes that the Buddhist influence “was far from that of Christianity” (133) on the new modernist intellectuals.

During the early twentieth century, education became a tool for strength, and Tikhonov highlights Koreans’ attempts to catch up with the Japanese by relying on Japanese and Western educational models, introducing obligatory education, while emphasizing the role of Christian missionaries in the educational arena. He also contends that the nationalist (anti-Japanese) slant that permeated Korean education during this period of historical turmoil led to exaggerated accounts of Korean national heroes, especially by figures such as Sin Ch’aeho and Ch’oe Namsŏn. This “educational” nationalism was soon accompanied by what Tikhonov describes as “muscular nationalism,” and with it, new ideals of masculinity that attempted to overcome what some saw as the passivity of Confucianism that had undervalued the great military hero’s
of Korea’s past (Chapter Seven).

The greatest criticism of this text comes from the author himself in the introduction, as discussed above, and while there are drawbacks, the text is quite refreshing in that it posits another source for Korea’s emerging sense of Nationalism from the 1880s to 1910s. In addition, it illustrates how an array of major historical figures from this period did engage with this new ideology, utilizing it to deal with their existential plight vis-à-vis Japanese colonization, despite the fact that it also seems to have encouraged some to collaborate in order to promote strength during a time of internal national weakness. In conclusion, it is not convincing, as the introduction suggests (9), that Social Darwinism had some “absolute” central role during Korea’s early encounter with modernity, but rather, some of its themes and aspirations converged with, and complemented some from other spheres, importantly, Christianity, which hovers throughout the entire text.

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During the 2010 G20 summit meetings in Seoul last November, the ch’anggũk piece “Ch’oŋg” (a version of The Tale of Sim Ch’oŋg) was specially performed for foreigners as a “national brand performance” (kukka bûraendû kongyŏn) by the National Changgeuk Company of Korea. This anecdote exemplifies ch’anggũk’s significance in contemporary Korean traditional music; while its traditionality still remains controversial, neither Koreans nor foreigners are familiar with the concept of ch’anggũk. The term ch’anggũk only appeared in the 1930s and it is often considered as the theatrically transformed form of p’ansori, which has been designated as a UNESCO Masterpiece in the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Mankind.

Andrew Killick’s timely publication, In search of Korean Traditional Opera, is the result of over a decade of research on ch’anggũk, from 1997 to 2008, including his Ph.D. study. It is also the first volume entirely focused on one genre of Korean music by a non-Korean ethnomusicologist written in English.
A handful of separate volumes on Korean traditional music by non-Korean ethnomusicologists have been published, but they deal with more than one genre.

Grounded in deep cultural knowledge that stems from Killick’s fieldwork in Korea, the book engages in both practical and theoretical ethnomusicological enquiry. Killick convincingly argues that “… ch’anggūk might win acceptance from Western audiences,” proving his theory by describing and analyzing different aspects of music making in ch’anggūk. In doing so, he touches upon crucial issues of contemporary ethnomusicology such as ethnicity, authenticity, identity, post-colonialism and globalization.

This book provides easy access to the unfamiliar genre of ch’anggūk and is suitable for a wide readership. The integration of the author’s voice, crafted from interviews, archival and historical research and extensive ethnographic investigation is demonstrated. His viewpoint of ch’anggūk as a foreigner differs from that of a Korean, as every aspect of ch’anggūk is fresh and interesting for him. This informs his detailed description and gives the reader a clear and fresh impression, both intellectually and emotionally. For example, the description he gives of the whole performance, from before the opening to curtain calls, and of details such as the theatre backgrounds, stage setting, costumes, the Korean audiences’ responses and the performers’ order for curtain calls, is illustrated as if we were touring the theatre with a guide and watching the performance. In addition, his observation is extended to the interpretation of the social and musical status of ch’anggūk and even the intention of Koreans who ask about Korean culture, including ch’anggūk, to foreigners (Introduction and Conclusion).

The book is divided into seven chapters, which reveal his argument step by step. Chapter 1 starts with a description of the most frequently staged piece, The tale of Ch’unhyang. It focuses on how this ch’anggūk is linked with various kinds of Korean traditional performing arts through an analysis of the story line. It contains not only p’ansori elements but also nando minyo (folk song form the southern provinces), taech’wit’a (royal processional music), sinawi (improvised polyphonic accompaniment), nongbu-ga (farmer’s song), salp’uri (shamanic exorcism dance), kŏmmu (sword dance), changgoch’um (the hourglass-drum dance), parach’um (the cymbal dance) and sijo songs. In spite of these descriptions, it is not clear how the five-hour p’ansori performance Ch’unhyang is transformed into the one-and-a-half hour ch’anggūk Ch’unhyang in terms of its musical and dramatic arrangement.

In Chapter 2, Killick’s ethnographic research engages the debate on ch’anggūk’s origin and origin myths by providing the different views of native and foreign scholars. He also provides the views of the Won’gaksa (the first
indoor Korean theater built in 1902) performances and other theatrical forms in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by early Western writers and diplomats in Korea such as William E. Griffis, Homer B. Hulbert, Major Herbert H. Austin and Horace N. Allen, all of whose accounts have been valuable in assessing ch'anggŭk's origin. Killick illustrates how the theatrical tradition in Korea is different from that of China and Japan through his comparative research. Consequently, he debunks ch'anggŭk as "a hybrid-popular theatrical form" influenced by colonialism.

The next three chapters show ch'anggŭk's historiography by focusing on its development and the successive challenges from the Japanese annexation to the present. The chapters concentrate on ch'anggŭk's major developments under Japanese colonial rule. He argues that the colonial regime did not suppress ch'anggŭk performances, a view which is quite different from that of nationalist historians (67). The discourse of the three chapters not only reflects ch'anggŭk's challenging history but clearly crosses the line into promoting ch'anggŭk. Although he emphasizes the non Korean's view point, one can feel his strong passion, his efforts and knowledge in promoting ch'anggŭk. He suggests solutions to its promotion as a globalized opera in the final two chapters.

The final two chapters deal with mutual approaches on how to make ch'anggŭk international and global. He analyzes the traditional p'ansori stories, the newly composed ch'anggŭk repertoire, the dramatic settings and new sounds. He concludes by answering passionately but cautiously the question "how might ch'anggŭk win acceptance from Western audiences." In the interest of globalization, he shows how Western audiences value unique Korean qualities or the indigenous ways of life. Therefore, ch'anggŭk should be shaped by not only adopting popular parts of p'ansori music itself, but also by symbolic and stylized acting, patterned dance-like movement, the ingenious use of a few simple props and other non-realist conventions, like the narrator (toch'ang). He also recommends not to chase Western "megamusic" but Korea's own "tailor-made space" in order to enhance the traditional quality and the purity of sound. This conclusion is based on the premise that ch'anggŭk's popularization (taejunghua) and globalization (segyeohwa) are not achieved in the same way and become incompatible with each other in the light of the traditional quality.

One big question, however, still remains, and that is the popularization of ch'anggŭk in Korea. People involved in ch'anggŭk have to confront especially the tricky interplay of "tradition" and "modernity." This question is especially complex in a milieu in which Korean traditional music, including ch'anggŭk has taken increasingly globalized routes, with performers often engaging in
hybrid fusions with non-Korean traditional music and instruments.

In spite of minor mistakes in scores and bibliography, this book is not only for foreigners interested in Korean theatrical version of p’ansori, but for ch’anggūk artists, administrators and researchers who are involved in the search for Korean traditional opera. In addition, Killick’s work includes a strong bibliography serviceable for further research. Therefore, if this book were to be translated into Korean it could act as a catalyst towards establishing an “authentic form of ch’anggūk” in the foreseeable future.

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If you go to the rural areas of South Korean after the rice-planting season, you will see everywhere rice fields in which young rice plants are planted in straight lines. Nowadays with the advance of modern machinery, most farmers use rice transplanting machines, but even in the 1970s one of the most common scenes in rural Korea was that of dozens of people transplanting rice seedlings together in a row. People standing shoulder to shoulder, transplant rice seedlings together along the string that two persons are holding on both ends, while nongak bands are playing music on the other side, is widely regarded as a seminal scene of rural, traditional Korea. This practice of rice-transplanting, which is conducted along the string held across the rice field, is called checkrowing (chŏngjiosik).

However, according to studies on Korean agriculture during the Japanese colonial period, this checkrowing was introduced to Korea in the Japanese colonial period. As recently as the early 1920s, checkrowing was not prevalent, even though people tended to keep even distances between rice plants while rice-transplanting. However, within about a decade, it had been applied to almost every rice field in Korea. Previous studies have ascribed this rapid change to the active and coercive policy of the Japanese colonial government that did not hesitate to use physical violence, even “uprooting the rice plants
that had been planted in traditional ways.” Other studies find the reason for the rapid change in people’s acknowledgement that the modern agricultural method, called “the improved technique,” was actually superior to the traditional one in terms of productivity.

These analyses are not totally wrong, but they tend to simplify the conflicts and competitions between the newly-introduced modern agricultural method and the traditional one. For instance, many Koreans actually resisted the forceful dissemination of checkrowing, but previous studies have overestimated this resistance as national resistance for liberation from Japanese colonial rule or conversely underestimated it as instantaneous defiance of Korean farmers due to their ignorance or inertia, or simply described it as a “rite of passage” in the process of the execution of a new policy. These interpretations do not explain why the Korean farmers held on to the traditional method even though they actually acknowledged the superiority of the modern agricultural practice when the new method of transplanting was actively advertized and disseminated by the colonial government. Neither can they explain the conflicts Korean farmers had with the colonial government on whether rice-plants should be planted densely or sparsely even after they had accommodated the new way of transplanting.

An Süngr’aek gives an answer to these questions by investigating the historical and geographical dynamics that constitute the environmental and technological background of the shift to checkrowing. He rejects the myth held in previous studies that the modern agricultural method was superior to the traditional way. He focuses instead on the differences between the natural environments of Korea and Japan and consequent differences in agricultural know-how. An uses the southern area of Kyŏnggi province as an example to show the differences in natural environment between the two countries and their resultant practices. The proportion of paddy fields to dry fields in the southern Kyŏnggi region was almost even, so that farmers were focusing on dry fields as much as on paddy fields and in this sense their agricultural practice was different from that of modern Japanese agriculture that consisted mostly of rice farming. Besides, focusing on the agriculture of southern Kyŏnggi province, An’s study proposes an antithesis to the previous studies that have written the agricultural history of Korea mainly on the basis of the rice farming of the three southern provinces (the Ch’ungch’ŏng, Chŏlla, and Kyŏngsang provinces). In other words, An’s study on the unique way of farming in the southern Kyŏnggi area expands our horizon to the previously neglected central and northern regions of Korea and provides a useful guide for a holistic and multilateral approach that corrects the biased previous
perspectives on Korean agriculture, and helps us consider the rice farming and dry farming of an individual household not in separation but in relation.

The author pays attention to the expansion of checkrowing in order to reveal the uniqueness of the southern Kyŏnggi area and show the conflict and competition that the traditional Korean agricultural method developed in the natural environment of Korea had experienced with the newly-introduced modern Japanese agricultural technique and investigates the inner dynamics lying behind the conflict. However, the extant documents represent mostly the viewpoints of learned people, that is, the elites and authorities of the Japanese colonial government, so that they are limited as resources for the perspectives of mostly illiterate farmers. (It is also because of the limitations of extant documents that previous research has neglected the issue of cultivation methods while mostly focusing on the problem of land improvement.) The author, however, has conducted oral research among residents of 157 villages and 129 towns in the 60 counties and 19 cities of southern Kyŏnggi province and compared numerous documents such as agricultural books, memoirs, and newspapers of Korea, Japan, and China to support his arguments.

The author concludes that the expansion of checkrowing in Japan is related to the dissemination of the rotary weeder, which saved the labor force required for weeding during the time of the Japanese-Russian war, but in Korea, on the other hand, the rotary weeder, which required straight lined watery paddies, was not efficient in the semi-arid climate of Korea so that Korean farmers did not feel an urgent need for checkrowing. Particularly in the southern Kyŏnggi region, the dry season continues until late spring and it begins to rain after the end of June. Furthermore, the time for rice-transplanting in rice fields coincided with the time for the harvest of winter crops as well as for the sowing of summer crops in dry fields. Doing these three kinds of work simultaneously made it difficult to practice the checkrowing that required the concentration of labor force. Therefore, Korean farmers' rejection of checkrowing was reasonable, and the Japanese government authorities and colonists who considered the traditional Korean agriculture as primitive and coarse and the Korean farmers who refused the improved technique as ignorant were actually revealing their own ignorance. An's study criticizes the Japanese colonists who embellished their flawed knowledge as the superiority of their modernity and morality, justifying their use of force and violence, and exposes the exploitative and expansionistic character of the Japanese colonial government that forced unnecessary and inappropriate changes.

However, the author does not simplify the situation by concluding that traditional Korean agriculture was always better or Korean farmers
accommodated the modern way of farming only due to the force of the colonial government. In fact, the author describes the various aspects in which modern agricultural technique collides with traditional Korean practice, refracting and transforming it, in relation to the changing political situations, socio-economical contexts, the agricultural policies of the Japanese colonial government, as well as the custom of Korean farmers and their response to modern agricultural techniques. He tries to avoid hasty generalization or stereotyping by considering the various aspects of actual practices in particular regions and conducts a comparative cultural study on the unique life-world of Korean agricultural society.

Finally, this book is not confined to the issue of the introduction of the modern agricultural techniques in the Japanese colonial period. It surveys the history of arguments on agricultural techniques since the late Chosôn dynasty as well as the controversies in Korean historical studies particularly concerning agricultural problems, so that this study discloses the intrinsic opposition between the landocracy that pursues large-scale agriculture and the peasantry that pursues small-scale agriculture. Therefore, this book has great significance not only for the elucidation of the problem of modern agricultural techniques but also for the direction of Korean agriculture in the future.

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The cover of this book has a picture of Hong Jin, chairman of the “Convention of Free Koreans” (Chayu Hanin taehoe) held in Chongqing in March 1943 shouting “Long Live Korean Independence!” Above him is written the subtitle “Memories of the Korean people’s suffering and resistance during the colonial period.” Thus the cover accurately conveys the book’s concept. This book can be considered a general chronological report on the Japanese colonial era. A wide variety of source materials including more than 800 photos and tables, advertisements, textbooks and postcards has been compiled, together with a detailed overview and chronology of the 35 years of occupation.

The author, Pak To, worked as a teacher for more than 30 years after
majoring in Korean language, while also writing novels and essays. Also, he made an effort compiling photograph books such as *Chiuul su òmnìi imiiji* 1, 2, 3 (Indelible images 1, 2, 3), *Na riì lullin Hanguk chönjaeng 100 changmyõn* (One hundred scenes from the Korean War that made me cry), *Saĵin ìro yökkiïn Han'guk tongnip undongsa* (History of the Korean Independence Movement compiled in photos), and *Han'guk chönjaeng II* (Korean War II).

Two thirds of the book consists of a chronological examination from shortly before Japan’s forced annexation to liberation, followed by special materials such as photos taken by foreigners, Japanese maps and postcards etc. The last part includes testimony of comfort women and Sakhalin migrants. In addition, the book also includes many pictures from personal collections, so that the photographic material is extremely varied.

Besides the visual material, the chronological part documents main events year by year; one chapter is devoted to each year from 1910 to 1945, each including a general overview and chronological tables of main events in the political, administrative, social, economic, cultural and living spheres. These are followed by relevant visual materials. Taking for example the year 1919, it briefly describes the March 1 independence movement followed by the establishment of the provisional government of the Republic of Korea in Shanghai, and the colonial government’s shift towards cultural policy. This is followed by chronological tables by area, as well as photographs.

In the field of politics and government, the chronological tables include the death of Kojong on January 21, the Declaration of Independence proclaimed in Tokyo on February 8, the reading of the Declaration of Independence by 33 dissidents on March 1, the appointment of Governor-General Saito on August 12, and the proclamation of cultural policy rule by the Government General on September 2. In the fields of culture and living, events such as the publication of the arts journal *Changjo* (Creation) by Kim Tongin, Chôn Yëngtaek, and Chu Yohan on February 1 and the screening of the first Korean movie *Urîjôk kut’u* (Righteous Battle) in Tansôngsa on October 27 are briefly explained. Also, for the photography materials, the shot of a group of wailing people in front of Taehanmun, gate to Tôksu palace, after hearing of the death of Gojong (January 22, 1919); the funeral cortege of March 3; and photographs of March 1 demonstrations can be mentioned among the materials illustrating historic events. Among the pictures of important persons are the group picture of Tokyo international students announcing the “February 8 Declaration of Independence,” the record of imprisonment of Yu Kwansun and a group picture of cabinet members of the provisional government of the Republic of Korea (October 11).
Thus, by placing the photographs behind the general overview by year and the chronological tables, this book makes readers realize the atmosphere and the historical state of each year separately; this is the book's strong point. However, no references or annotations are provided for the items in the chronological tables or the photographs. Therefore, even though the book helps to convey the big picture and allows the reader to feel the vivid atmosphere of those days, for a deeper understanding of each event and person, the book can only serve as a compass, pointing to other directions for further study.

What distinguishes this book from other photo collections or documentaries based on records of that time is that it includes graduation pictures and photos from personal albums as well as the testimonies of three comfort women and four Sakhalin migrants. Thus, its greatest contribution is that it manages to partly avoid the pitfall of reconstructing events only on the basis of materials made for public purposes or use, or reflecting the outsider's gaze.

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