

Book Review

Kang Jeongwon 강정원, ed. 2020. 『현대화와 민속문화』
[Modernization and folk culture]. Seoul: Minsokwon
민속원. 320 pp. ISBN 9788928515356 ₩20,000

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Modernization and Folk Culture is the fifth volume of the Korean Anthropology Series published by the Institute of Cross-Cultural Studies at Seoul National University. Along with other volumes in the series, this book sheds light on a specific field within Korean anthropology: folklore studies. More specifically, as stated in the title, the book investigates the place of folk culture in the actual world and academic discourses, both significantly shaped by the phenomenon of modernization. Here “modernization,” translated as *hyundaehwa*, refers to the grand transformation of Korean society since the 1945 liberation or, in a broader sense, since the late nineteenth century. In this book, folk culture is understood not only as the residue of rapid changes in political and economic domains but also as a distinctive layer of everyday life, with unique and autogenous power. Sharing this view, 6 authors explore unprecedented transformations in different elements of folk culture, such as religion, agriculture, handicraft, music, festival, and knowledge and their entanglements in Korea’s modernization process. Those articles collectively form a mosaic showing how folk culture has carried on in modernized Korea.

The first chapter, written by Kang Jeongwon, provides a theoretical framework to analyze the relation of modernization and folk culture. Kang posits the concept of lifeworld as divided into two different worlds: (1)

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“system world” (*chegyesegeye*), based on instrumental rationality and governed mainly by state or market; and (2) “folk world” (*minsoksegye*), which is closely related to value rationality, affections, and tradition, and is governed by culture and individual subjects. That dual view of the world corresponds to the view of humans as having two opposing tendencies and living in both worlds at the same time. In this dualistic view, modernization is understood as affecting not only the system world but also the folk world, and thus both worlds are shown as simultaneously modernized. The author applies this framework to dealing with the case of Korean religion and explains how modernization collapsed the balanced relationship between system religion and folk religion, causing ruptures and chaos. The chapter specifies the epistemic place of folk culture within the world we occupy and offers analytic tools for a more organized approach in folklore studies.

In Chapter 2, Bae Yeongdong investigates how the modernization of agriculture caused extensive changes in Korean rural society. Here modernization is understood as the development of agricultural technology and its impact on production processes. The author points out that the central process in agricultural modernization is the transition from subsistence farming to commercial farming in the 1970s, accompanied by mechanization and the introduction of vinyl greenhouses and chemical fertilizers. Mainly based on data collected from five villages in Yeongyang of North Gyeongsang Province, he examines the following changes in rural communities regarding three aspects: (1) forms of labor and working hours; (2) demographics and social relations within villages; (3) folk beliefs and rituals, and daily life, including leisure, diet, and housing. The detailed explanation he provides confirms that substructural changes profoundly influenced social and cultural life, so the chapter emphasizes the importance of technology in dealing with the relation of modernization and folk culture.

If Chapter 2 attempts to cover a wide range of transformations, Chapter 3 focuses on how people react to or participate in those changes, using as a case study the production of *yugi* (brassware) in Napcheongjeong in Jeongju of North Pyeongan Province in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. According to the chapter’s author, Yim Geunhye, *yugi* producers were not merely bearers of traditional culture but rather people vigorously adapting to an ever-changing work environment. Faced with unfolding historic changes, they tried to find ways to maintain and adapt their technology. During the colonial period (1910–1945), while shop owners established corporations to introduce the factory system, craftspeople formed labor

unions to fight for higher wages and better working conditions. After the 1945 liberation, shop owners and craftspeople from Napcheongjeong tried to continue producing *yugi* in South Korea, flexibly reacting to their frequently changing environment, such as decreasing *yugi* consumption or the revival of traditional culture, including craftworks. Yim shows that the relation between modernization and folk culture is not antagonistic and is shaped by individuals as active agents.

The multilayered relation between modernization and folk culture is found not only in tangible culture but also in intangible culture, such as music. In Chapter 4, Kwon Hyeokhee traces how *pungmul* (traditional music performed by farmers) has been given different uses and meanings through the twentieth century. Attentive to both the governmental perspective and that of the general public, the author describes how *pungmul*, once separated from its original context in farming culture, has been differently performed and symbolized in different historical periods, such as colonization in the early twentieth century and democratization of the 1980s. Here, two points are highlighted: (1) the way *pungmul* has become folk art and has been played in recital contests; (2) the way *pungmul* has been used in resistance movements. While the former was closely related to national policies, the latter, from the labor movement in the colonial period to the student movement in the 1980s, was connected to counter-culture. Those two aspects helpfully illuminate other aspects of the dynamic between folk culture and modernization.

In dealing with intangible culture and its modern reconstruction, Chapter 5, written by Oh Changhyun, pays attention to the dimension of local community. The author examines how the *Dano* (the fifth day of the fifth month in the lunar calendar) Festival in Beopseongpo has been initiated, halted, and revived through the turbulent period from mid-nineteenth century to the present day. Approaching culture historically, the author disassembles the “invented tradition” of *Dano* Festival and provides a more convincing explanation of the festival’s beginning and its subsequent transformations. Regarding conditions after the 1945 liberation and the Korean War (1950–1953), two different trends are highlighted: nationalism represented by the Cultural Properties Protection Law and (post) consumerism related to the pursuit of authenticity. The author shows that the transformations in *Dano* Festival resulted from a compromise between those two trends. Here the local communities are depicted as active participants in the process of making and remaking the tradition and in

expressing their craving for community itself.

Sharing the focus on the local community, Chapter 6 explores more microscopic dynamics with the case of a movement against the establishment of a wind power station in Yeongyang. Unlike in the previous chapters based on a historical approach, Lee Jinkyoo centers on the most recent and ongoing process in the issue of modernization and folk culture. Due to decreasing populations and rapid aging, South Korean rural communities often face the pressure of developmentalism. The case of H village shows how local residents, ostensibly in a weaker position, mobilized among themselves, utilized their own cultural knowledge, and eventually succeeded in preventing construction of a power plant in their village. Here the folk conception of the mountain as a sacred place, along with other practical reasons, formed a compelling basis for their activism. Moreover, the folk knowledge of local ecology, particularly regarding flora and fauna, was recalled and given new importance in constructing villagers' arguments against the power plant. This case study reveals how folk culture is utilized and relied upon amidst controversial circumstances, confirming its vivid contemporary relevance.

Overall, the 6 chapters show that modernization and folk culture are in a dynamic relationship and affect each other not unilaterally but reciprocally. Each chapter, in its own distinctive way, reveals the nature of this relationship as well as the tensions hidden within the simple word "and," which is used to connect folk culture to modernization. The antagonism between the two originates from different temporal orientations that conceive of modernization as directed toward the future and folk culture as looking back to the past, in continuity with it. As shown in the chapters of this volume, both modernization and folk culture belong to the present, where we live our daily lives. Their inevitable encounters construct the conditions for how we think, feel, and live in the world. Along with other volumes in the Korean Anthropology Series, this volume contributes to a richer understanding of contemporary Korean culture, by casting light on folk culture as a substantial part of it and revealing the complexity of its relation to modernization.