

***Future Yet to Come: Sociotechnical Imaginaries in Modern Korea.* Edited by Sonja M. Kim and Robert Ji-Song Ku. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2021. 274 p [ISBN: 9780824889609]**

*Derek Kramer**

The classic historiographical critique of a teleological narrative will be familiar to many. The stance is characterized by a productive skepticism towards accounts of the past as determined and determinative. It calls into question what are often popularly thought to be some of history's most fundamental traits. Namely, its consecutive, progressive, and accumulative character. Yet, while holding on to our skepticism, historians would do well to draw a distinction between the linear winds of history and the many historical forecasts of those winds. This particular approach is wonderfully modeled in a *Future Yet to Come*. Edited by Sonja M. Kim and Robert Ji-Song Ku, the volume blends together a collection of recent interventions from the complementary fields of science and technology studies (STS) as well as the history of science, technology, and medicine (HSTM). Showcasing the impressive scope of some of Korean Studies most talented scholars, the work underscores the particular utility of the peninsula as a case study for the intricacies of the modern past and present. *Future Yet to Come*

* Li Foundation Research Fellow, Needham Research Institute, University of Cambridge

is not a parochial application of STS theory or HSTM methodologies to Korea. Rather, through its congregation of contributors, the work constitutes a purposeful attempt to advance these two fields through the lens of peninsular experience. This it does with considerable effect.

Future Yet to Come's main theoretical intervention makes its situated approach to science, technology, and medicine on the peninsula particularly apt. Drawing off of recent work by Sheila Jasanoff and Sang-Hyun Kim, the book employs "sociotechnical imaginaries" as an organizing mechanism for its many parts. While in conversation with a wide range of antecedents, the term itself was coined in a 2009 study on the South Korean and American nuclear energy programs.¹ The idea of "sociotechnical imaginaries" then went through a much needed course of refinement and clarification in Jasanoff and Kim's 2015 work *Dreamscapes of Modernity*.² Put in distilled form, the concept underscores the social and cultural salience of the future in the articulation and formulation of lived historical realities. In this regard, "sociotechnical imaginaries" bears a great deal of similarity with historical works focused on the history of futures past, as well as literary studies on the temporal dimensions of both science fiction and popular science literature. However, important distinctions stand out. Most notably, the concept directs specific attention to the circular role that science and technology play in formulations of the future. It is not just that technoscientific change alters the worlds we live in, but that they assert a profound influence over our articulations of those future worlds. These situated iterations of tomorrow are what the editors of *Future Yet to Come* set out to trace.

Future Yet to Come's three sections are weaved together with this

-
- 1 Jasanoff, Sheila, and Sang-Hyun Kim. "Containing the Atom: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and Nuclear Regulation in the U.S. and South Korea." *Minerva* 47:2 (2009):119-46.
 - 2 Jasanoff, Sheila, and Sang-Hyun Kim, *Dreamscapes of Modernity: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and the Fabrication of Power* (University of Chicago Press, 2015).

historicized understanding of the tomorrows of the past in mind. As with many edited volumes, there is a notable degree of variation across parts. Some sections are more polished than others. Some chapters are better defined by the conclusions they suggest than by the ones they demonstrate. Finally, some contributors are better attuned to the editor's overarching theoretical approach. It may be tempting to critically view this variation to be an issue of curation, but it is equally possible that readers use the sections of the books to consider the theory's utility in their own right. Indeed, it is this valued approach that is encouraged in the introduction.

The first section of the text, "Recollecting Sociotechnical Imaginaries," sets out three separate interfaces between forms of state and social power in connection with instances of technoscientific formulation and change. The first chapter by Don Baker offers a sweeping overview of engagements with the material and natural realm as situated in the metaphysical conventions of the Chosŏn era. Here, by emphasizing empirical and observational aspects of Neo-Confucian knowledge production, the chapter sets out important footings meant to question the definitive authority of Europe as the source of scientific authority. A second contribution by Sonja Kim, one of the volume's editors, develops a discussion of medical praxis as shaped by the moral and social dimensions of care. Again, this approach effectively challenges diffusionist accounts of medical science by showing how this moral framing continued to inform ideas of health across institutions and regimes. Inkyu Kang's third chapter concludes the section with the recent past. This is done through a carefully framed study of Hwang Woo-suk's fraudulent cloning claims. Rather than turn to a moralizing account of academic dishonesty, this chapter frames the story of Hwang with the contingencies of a South Korean state and market in the mists of new neoliberal crosswinds.

The second section, "Restoring Minds and Bodies," turns the reader's attention to the realms of the conscience, the corporeal and the corporate. The chapters aggregate a range of themes that might in an-

other work be captured under the canopy of biopolitics, but that here are situated, at times uneasily, into a conversation with a plurality of futurities. Chapter four, by Theodore Jun Yoo, revisits his earlier work on suicide as a social phenomenon in early twentieth century Korea. Effectively positioned in the crossflows of colonialism, the section follows both the commercial popularization and social pathologization of suicide in the context of urban modern space. Chapter five, by Jane Kim, turns to the leprosarium as a site constructed as much by the shifting logic of Cold War thought as by therapeutics. Tracing the work of the World Health Organization in postwar Korea, the contribution sets out how concerns over social stability and systemic authority could be as potent as those related to treatment. Chapter six, by John DiMoia, follows up on some of these themes by providing a textured demonstration of the transnational networks that composed and constrained the science of rehabilitation in post-war South Korea. Through a range of actors, organizations, and orientations, DiMoia offers a condensed account of the mutability of notions about disabled bodies. Finally, the section is brought to a close by Jieun Lee's captivating discussion of stem-cell banks and bio-insurance in present-day South Korea. Keenly attentive to the powerful ideological and market dimensions of health, chapter seven examines how projections of illness engender the future as a central component in everyday articulations of healthfulness.

The third section of *Future Yet to Come*, "Prosthetic Arts," draws from the wealth of sophisticated analysis of science and technology from the complementary fields of photography, art history, and media studies. A chapter by Hye-ri Oh opens the section with a thoughtful examination of realist photography and the character of technology as a scope for interfacing with the politics everyday. As Oh artfully demonstrates, transformations in the fields of chemistry and optics allowed for new ways of reproducing reality that could augment a viewer's eye for the social. Chapter nine by Steven Cho turns to the captivating work of Nam June Paik which typifies how interfaces with media

technology help constitute new registers of memory and political constitution. Here, the famed artist's biography and work are read together to emphasize how technology was mediating novel modes of personal and global articulation. The book ends with a story of the end. In chapter ten, Haerin Shin provides a condensed account of the 2012 trilogy *Doomsday Book*. More a coda than a conclusion, this part looks at the congregation of closures science and technology introduce into narratives of the end. Importantly, rather than establish these outcomes of science as modern problems in need of modern solutions, Shin considers the alterity of techno-horror as a point of everyday interface for the characters under examination.

Braiding together this sequence of sections and chapters is the introduction by Sonja Kim. Here the editor discusses how the idea of "sociotechnical imaginaries" comes into a productive analytical discussion with the larger story of peninsula history. The broader contours of this history largely conform to how the twentieth century has been narrated in South Korea. Flowing out of the destruction of the Korean War, an authoritarian and developmentalist state mobilized science and technology as part of a frenetic process of modernization. Under a state-led understanding of science and technology as national traits, populations were mobilized and economic winners were selected. Kim uses this context to suggest the ways the "sociotechnical imaginaries" can gain traction as a mode of investigation and account. With the nation acting as the vehicle of history, the concepts of developmentalism, scientism and technological progressivism each came together to ground an acute politics of tomorrow. Kim borrows from the recent work of Warwick Anderson, Fa-ti Fan and Hiromi Mizuno to bring up how science and technology under the condition of postcolonial developmentalism take on the contours of both the national and the local. For Kim, science and technology cannot be understood as rigid pillars of universal authority, carved in the Greco-Roman style and housed somewhere in Europe. Instead, they are active and interlaced fields of praxis, knowledge, and objects that can only be understood as specifi-

cally situated in place and time. This is not a story of diffusionism or mimicry, but of a science and technology that is encountered on its own terms.

It is in part because of the overwhelming appeal of the editor's historiographical approach that some of *Future Yet to Come's* omissions stand out so keenly. Most pressing is the question of the nation. Notably, this is the very item that also confounded Jasanoff and Kim in their first presentation of the term "sociotechnical imaginaries." In their 2009 article, "Containing the Atom," the authors attempted to introduce their analytical intervention by way of two contrasting stories of the South Korean and American nuclear energy programs. Certainly as specialists of this topic will note, such a clean bifurcation is utterly implausible. From the vastness of popular science culture to the intricacies of research exchanges the two polities both sojourned and imagined the atomic age together. Even Jasanoff tepidly concedes in the first chapter of the later *Dreamscapes of Modernity*, that their early introduction to "sociotechnical imaginaries" suggested an uncomfortably linear correspondence between the nation state and projections of the future.

Readers are confronted by a similar pattern in *Future Yet to Come*. At times the textured and contested story of science and technology on the peninsula becomes entirely too coherent in this work. With almost all roads leading to a discussion of the Republic of Korea, some might rightly wonder if the concept of "sociotechnical imaginaries" can really add anything to the already vast literature on science and technology in developmentalist settings. Of course, not all chapters conflate Korea with the South or its political antecedents, but on the whole the generalization stands. In a sense, the problem may not be that there is too much nation in this account, but not enough. For instance, some will wonder where the Korea of the colonial era resides. That was, after all, the setting where the first popular confluences tying the fate of the nation with science and technology emerged. Mirroring imperial projects, this polity is a forceful reminder of the many postcolonial chal-

lenges that the nation as unit of history reproduces. Likewise, some will be left guessing where the Koreas of the Cold War are. These were the polities that existed within, not as a part, of contesting global orders. Whether in the socialist sphere or the liberal world, science and technology were measures of systemic authenticity, not just national development. Correspondingly, the achievement of new metropolises were often celebrated as victories of the systemic whole. Finally, most will be confounded over where North Korea is in this account. After all, the aim of this project is to revive the stories of science and technology that are firmly rooted in the social and local. With this in mind, North Korea, with its rich institutional histories and popular cultures of science and technology is desperately missed. Not just because of its sorted past of technoscientific success and failure, but because of the unique critiques and challenges to scientific knowledge as a feature of modern power that circulated there.

These points of concern will certainly not come as a surprise to the editors and contributors to *Future Yet to Come*. Nor should they detract from the important contribution this book constitutes. The editors and contributors to this volume forcefully bring our attention to the salience of the future. In doing so their work reminds us how modern political subjects are temporally arrayed across pasts, presents, and futures. Attending to this actuality requires scholars to address power for differing futurities in their constitution of both contemporary and historical analysis. *Future Yet to Come* fully demonstrates the substantial salience of this particular social interface with science, technology, and time. May our own field's future benefit from its compelling analytical insights and methodological encouragements.

