The Study of Korean Villages during the Japanese Colonial Period and Colonial Modernity

Lee Yong-ki*

Implications of the Study of Villages during the Japanese Colonial Period

Villages, or ‘maül’ as they are generally known in Korean, have traditionally served as the basic life unit for peasants, and as communal solidarity and autonomous spaces. Prior to Korea becoming an industrial society, the great majority of Koreans consisted of villages. It was within these villages that peasants lived their daily lives, conducted production activities, formed primary human relationships, and were socialized. In addition, peasants also conducted autonomous activities within these villages, such as the coordination of relationships with other members within the community, resolution of problems requiring responses at the village level, and the preservation of the internal communal order. Therefore, the village was perceived as a self-sufficient life zone rather than as a physical entity composed of the cluster of houses. More to the point, it was viewed as a social integration mechanism, or social community which housed the independent customs and notions, as well as structural integration principles, which had been accumulated over time.¹

On the other hand, villages were the lowest unit of rule and control by

* Research Professor, Academy of East Asian Studies, Sungkyunkwan University
the state. Up until the mid-Chosŏn dynasty, natural villages, which were the basic unit of communal life of the people, were subordinated within the local administrative village system under the control of the local ruling elites called the chaeji sajok (在地士族, local leading clans or influentials). However, in according to the strengthening of the myŏnni (面里, township and village) system and the implementation of communal tax responsibilities at the local administrative village level from the 18th century onwards, natural villages had broken away from the local village system under the control of local influentials and started to form their own independent tongni (洞里, village). In this process during the late Chosŏn era, the villages were organized as the lowest unit in terms of the taking of population census and the collecting of taxes. ² During the premodern era, the rule of the state over the villages was limited to the collection of tax payments; meanwhile, the internal governance of villages remained as an autonomous matter. However, the establishment of a modern-style local control system during the Japanese colonial period resulted in the state’s control over Korean villages being greatly increased. As the colonial authority was a ‘productive’ power which was characterized by disciplinary power, it pursued an active rule and control policy toward individual farming households and the people. As the villages became the central nexus from which such rule and control was carried out, the state power was able to penetrate into the village that had heretofore been an autonomous sphere.

Villages during the Japanese colonial period were autonomous and communal spaces of the peasants; however, they also served as the lowest unit within the colonial ruling system. They were dynamic spaces within which the autonomy of the people (minjung) and the ruling system of the state interacted and came into conflict. As a result, studies on villages during the Japanese colonial period can provide an excellent basis for the analysis of the peasant class that constituted an absolute majority’s experiences of colonial modernity. Furthermore, such studies help facilitate the analysis of the changes that took place in the traditional autonomous order as a result of the rule and control of the colonial power,
as well as of the responses of the people to such colonial policies. In short, the study of Korean villages during the Japanese colonial period allows us to deepen and expand the perception of ‘colonial modernity’, by facilitating the understanding of issues such as those of ‘control and autonomy,’ ‘tradition and modernity,’ and ‘community and individuals’ that emerged in the people’s everyday lives.

**Research Trends**

The study of villages during the Japanese colonial period began with investigations conducted by the colonial authority itself. The Japanese colonial government’s investigation of its colony took many forms; these included documentary analysis, researches of old customs and practices, and assessments of actual conditions. One of the most representative studies conducted on villages was carried out by Zensho Eisuke. More to the point, Zensho conducted a documentary analysis and nationwide assessment of the actual conditions of Korean villages, the results of which he published in a series of works. Zensho identified the ‘clan village’ that effectively combined the notions of regionalism and kinship, as the main characteristic of Korean villages.³ Zensho’s study involved the collection of an extensive amount of information related to Korean villages during the Japanese colonial period. However, as this study was conducted to assist the rural control policy of the Government-General of Chosŏn, it heavily reflects the viewpoint of the administrative authority. This study is also limited by the fact that it did not involve thorough research on individual villages, but rather nationwide general investigation. During the final period of the Japanese colonial era, Suzuki Eitaro conducted an in-depth study on Korean villages using the fieldwork methods. His study also involved a certain degree of comparisons with Japan.⁴ Suzuki addressed in a detailed manner the matter of the internal order and traditional practices of the *kudongni* (舊洞里, old village) system.⁵ In this regard, he equated the *kudongni*
system of Chosŏn with the natural villages found in Japan. The studies and research on Korean villages carried out during the Japanese colonial era provided the basic information and cognitive framework that were required to further study of this subject. However, the colonialism-based gaze evident in the basic information and cognitive framework associated with these early studies means that these works must inevitably be critically assessed.

The post-liberation era, and more specifically the 1960s-1980s, saw many studies be conducted on villages in the fields of sociology, anthropology, and folklore. However, these studies did not take into account the historical context, but rather focused on the existing state of rural villages or on the traditional customs. Furthermore, the studies of villages largely carried out during the 1980s-1990s in the field of the social history of late Chosŏn dynasty, were limited to research on the premodern era, and as such were not connected to the study of the villages during the Japanese colonial period.

Actual studies of the villages during the Japanese colonial era were not conducted for a long time after liberation. From the 1990s this theme was dealt with as a part of the studies of the rural control policy during the Japanese colonial period. To this end, a series of the studies on the rural control and ruling policy was published that dealt with such topics as the establishment of the local administrative system that revolved around the abolishment and integration of tongni during the 1910s, the model village policy of the 1920s, Rural Revitalization Campaign of the 1930s, and the wartime mobilization policy from the late 1930s. Such studies focused on how the villages were exploited and reorganized during the Japanese colonial period. These studies concluded that although the Japanese colonial government had sought to disorganize the autonomous base of villages during the process of establishing modern local ruling system, the traditional autonomous order that had been established at the kudongni level continued to exist. In turn, the colonial government responded to this by gradually making use of, and reorganizing, the communal order of villages as a part of its efforts to establish effective control and
mobilization. This, along with the advent of the village revitalization center established during the Rural Revitalization Campaign of the 1930s, eventually resulted in the replacement of the tonggye (洞契, traditional village self-governing organization) that had long existed within each village. As a result, the autonomous order of villages was transformed by the colonial authority into a government-led order.

These studies made it possible to develop a better understanding of the characteristics of the modern reorganization of rural society, as well as of the rural control policy of the colonial government. However, the strong top-down viewpoint exhibited in this research on the control policy of the Japanese colonial government results in these studies being saddled with the following limitations. First, villages were treated as only the objects of control and rule of the Government-General of Chosŏn over rural society. These studies centered on the intentions and policy decisions of the colonial power, and were focused on the characteristics of the colonial authority in terms of its attempts to capture and reorganize villages by penetrating into the lowest units of rural society. The result is an absence of the responses that occurred at the village level in these studies, and an inherently power-oriented approach. Second, there is a strong emphasis in these studies on the oppression and violence of the colonial power. As a result, there is an absence of any perception of the modern changes that emanated from colonial rule. In cases where such modern changes are recognized, they tend to be perceived as the result of an ‘abnormal’ phenomenon, or as a distortion of normal and universal (Western) modernity. In the end, these studies failed to properly perceive the independent responses and autonomy of peasants, and the characteristics of colonial modernity implicit therein.

Recent studies have sought to deepen the analysis of the detailed elements of the rural control policy implemented at the village level, as well as of the response of the peasants to the rural control policy of the colonial government. Unlike earlier studies that emphasized the unilateral enforcement and control of the colonial power and the eventual subsumption of peasants within the government-controlled system, these
recent studies have attempted to, based on the autonomous behaviors and choices of the peasant class, reveal the characteristics of colonial modernity as viewed through the relationship between the colonial power and peasants.

As a part of his analysis of the political and economic collaboration and resistance relationship that existed between the colonial power, local landlords, and peasants, Matsumoto Takenori\textsuperscript{11} established a three-layer structural model which he referred to as ‘individual peasant- village morality- external norms.’ Matsumoto introduced the features of the peasants who took, in their capacity as rational actors, individualistic steps to increase their income, despite the presence of an equalitarian communal moral economy within the villages. Moreover, he also analyzed the influence of the external norms (modernism) established by the colonial power. According to Matsumoto, the local landlord class, which he regarded as not being free of the moral pressure associated with an equalitarian community, had traditionally played the leading role within their respective villages, and functioned as an element which helped to coordinate the conflicts that emerged within rural society through their compassionate control of peasants. However, the increased tax burden occasioned by the growth in the collective goods required by the colonial power, and the drop in grain prices caused by the economic depression that erupted during the Showa Period, had the effect of pushing compassionate management to its inherent limits. As a result, the local landlord class, which was increasingly becoming what can be termed as ‘dynamic landlords’, began to see their position as village leaders slip away from the late 1920s onwards. In the 1930s, the landlord class was replaced as the leading group within rural society by the new leading figures (中堅人物) who were upper class independent peasants and had internalized ‘the privatization ideology’ under the influence of the Government-General of Chosôn’s Rural Revitalization Campaign.\textsuperscript{12} Under the wartime structure, the colonial power was able to use these leading figures to ensure the penetration of its hegemonic control at the village level.
Yun Hae-dong’s approach to the analysis of villages involved the establishment of a triple-layered structure (myŏn (township) - village – internal organization of the village) that effectively combined the ‘top-down (ruling)’ and ‘bottom-up (autonomy)’ viewpoints. Yun regarded this triple-layers as respectively representing the elements of administrative control, the connection of control and autonomy, and the village autonomy. Yun maintains that the roots of the modern ruling structure can be traced back to the colonial government’s implementation of the myŏn (township) system in 1917. Based on the active use of the kujang (village headman) associated with the sindongni (new administrative village) that had been created as a result of the reorganization of the myŏn unit, the colonial government was able to have its influence reach all the way down to the village level. Nevertheless, the failure to fundamentally disorganize the autonomous order that existed at the kudongni (old natural village) level resulted in the dual structure of village governance characterized by the presence of an administrative representative in the form of the village headman (kujang) and the actual power holders (local elders and landlord) remaining in place up to the final period of Japanese colonialism. In addition, the colonial government sought to dismantle traditional solidarity in the village by transforming the various kinds of traditional kye (village associations) to the modern and official corporations. As a result, the previously autonomous nature of the village associations known as tonggye was disturbed, and these entities eventually became specialized village organizations tasked with a variety of functions that ranged from the public interest to the daily life, production and finances. However, much to the colonial government’s intents, the internal organization of villages was never completely incorporated into the government-led system. The continued existence of autonomous organizations within villages meant that the traditional communal relationships that existed within these villages were also maintained until the end of the Japanese colonial era.

In his study, Kim Minchul attempted to classify the pattern of the villages’ responses to the colonial power. Kim assumed that although the
colonial power and capital’s ability to penetrate villages had in fact resulted in concrete changes within villages, these changes were not unilateral changes, but rather strategic and selective reactions of the peasants to modern and colonial rule. Kim established four conceptual models for the interactions between administrative penetration and village autonomy: the administrative and farm type in which the external power, in the form of administrative and capital penetration, is high while village autonomy is low; the model village type in which administrative penetration and village autonomy are combined in a synergic manner; the backward type in which both administrative penetration and village autonomy are extremely low, thereby resulting in the village being backwards both from an economic and social standpoint; and the autonomous type in which the high level of village autonomy effectively countered any attempts at penetration by the administrative power. Based on these four conceptual models, Kim classified the responses to the colonial authority proffered by individual villages found in existing case studies and the surveys of the Government-General of Chosŏn.

The above studies paid close attention to how the two elements known as the controls by the colonial power and the responses of the villagers or peasants interacted, and considered the leadership of villages as having played an intermediary role between control and autonomy. In addition, unlike earlier studies that unilaterally emphasized the oppressive and compulsory nature of the colonial power, and pointed out the abnormal and warped nature of colonial modernity, recent studies not only perceived colonial modernity in a critical manner, but also regarded the two sides (progression of instrumental rationality and the locus of control stemming from the use of modern disciplinary power) of modernity as being inherent within colonial rule. However, as their studies were also based on policy and survey materials compiled by the Government-General of Chosŏn, they also tend to view the internal structure of villages through the latter’s logic and materials. As a result, the failure to adequately combine the top-down and bottom-up viewpoints results in such studies stopping short of exposing the existence of the two sides,
namely control and autonomy, and of the various types of villages. In addition, this also results in causing much ambiguity with regards to the internal situation within villages.

As such, despite having enhanced interest and expanded the vantage points from which the internal structure of villages are perceived, the top-down approach employed has ensured that these studies conducted on villages during the Japanese colonial period have been saddled with limitations in terms of their ability to concretely perceiving the actual state of internal villages. However, some of the recent case studies have provided clues to overcoming these limitations.\(^\text{15}\)

Using the village documents from Taejŏ-ri, Yechŏn-kun in Kyŏngbuk Province, Rhee Younghoon delved into the changes that occurred within the village order from the late Chosŏn to the early Japanese colonial era.\(^\text{16}\) Rhee argues that during the late Chosŏn period, villages did not implement the communal duties related to their everyday lives in an integrated manner. More to the point, the hierarchal order that separated yangban (兩班, the nobles) and sangmin (常民, commoner) had the effect of obstructing the formation of a sense of solidarity and integration amongst the village people. In additions, various associations (kye) with different goals and spheres of operation were organized not just inside of the village in a multi-layered manner. Therefore Korean villages in the 19\(^{\text{th}}\) century could not function as a community capable of integrating the villagers and retaining actual authority. As such, villages during this period functioned as little more than residential areas, and as the lowest administrative unit. Furthermore, due to the disintegration and crisis of whole society during the late 19\(^{\text{th}}\) century, the autonomous order within the villages almost reached the point of collapse such as the widespread dissolution of the tonggye. However, a new bureaucratic or commoner-oriented order established by the colonial power in the 1920s made it possible to once again integrate these villages and create a unified space. Using surprisingly rich documents on Tajŏ-ri, Rhee was able to create an interesting outlook on village life during late Chosŏn. Rhee also introduced a novel interpretation of the composition and characteristics of
hamin (servant class) during late Chosŏn, and revealed the existence of two-man-kye (one-on-one joint association) between yangban and hamin or landlords and tenants. However, Rhee perceived the autonomous order of villages in late Chosŏn dynasty in an extremely negative manner and prematurely asserted that a ‘commoner-oriented order’ had been established by the colonial authority in villages during the colonial period. This standpoint leads to the conclusion that modernization was wrought by the colonial power while rejecting the internal historical dynamism of Korean society, or so-called ‘19th century crisis theory’ and the theory of colonial modernization.

Based on a case study of Ŭsŏ-ri, Changhŭng-kun in Chŏnnam Province, Lee Yong-ki analyzed the various phases of state control and village autonomy from the 1860s to the 1950s. This study, which was based on the autonomous village organization known as the tonggŏe, is significant in that it was the first to analyze in a methodical manner the changes in village autonomy during the transitional period to modernity, as well as during the formation of the modern nation-state. Lee maintains that the village-rooted tonggŏe, which were led by local leading clans or influentials during the Chosŏn era, were reorganized and expanded to become autonomous village organizations during the final period of the 19th century. In this regard, the communal solidarity and autonomous order formed around the tonggŏe remained a constant, and this despite the colonial power’s establishment of a modern local control system. The autonomous order of villages did in fact face important difficulties after the tonggŏe were integrated into the wartime mobilization system during the final period of Japanese colonialism. Nevertheless, the tonggŏe-centered communal solidarity and autonomous system continued all the way up to the 1950s, or right up until Korean society entered the industrialization stage.

As such, recent studies could have dealt with the actual state of the internal structure of villages from pre-modern to modern era due to analyzing village documents written by the villagers themselves. These studies have helped to establish the foundation for a better understanding
of the autonomous order and customs within the internal structure of villages, an element that had been absent from previous studies that were more geared towards the analysis of policy history. However, as these studies for the most part revolve around individual case studies, the establishment of a generalized framework for the study of villages during the Japanese colonial period has remained elusive.

**Issues and Future Tasks**

Based on the above reviews, the core issues raised in the existing studies will now be fleshed out, and the future tasks and directions which should be pursued in the study of villages during the Japanese colonial period will be suggested. By combining the top-down and bottom-up approaches, recent studies have effectively dealt with how the control by the colonial power engaged and conflicted with the responses and autonomy at village level. The core issues addressed in these studies include the degree of penetration of colonial rule achieved through intermediaries between control and autonomy, the changes in the internal order of those villages which were incorporated into the influence area of the colonial power, and the characteristics of traditional factors which continued to exist within the village despite the advent of colonial modernity. In this regard, the different interpretations of these issues can be perceived as being related to the gap in terms of the perceptions of colonial modernity.

**Colonial Control’s Penetration of Villages or Villages’ Acceptance of Colonial Control**

Recent studies have paid attention to the ‘mid-level members of the ruling class’ who, based on their standing as intermediaries between control and autonomy, played the role of the proxy for the colonial power on one hand, while also serving as representatives of the village on the other. In terms of the composition and changes wrought to this mid-level
ruling class, researchers have generally agreed that *jibang yuji* (local influential) who had traditional reputation and authority on their sides, were at the center of mid-level ruling class during the early stages. However, from the Rural Revitalization Campaign of the 1930s onwards, and especially after the implementation of the wartime mobilization system during the final period of Japanese colonialism, these individuals were replaced by the so-called *jungkyun inmul* (leading figure). These leading figures were ‘modernized’ working-level leaders who emanated from the ranks of the elite independent farmer class. Nonetheless, opinions have differed on the question of the extent to which colonial control was able to penetrate local villages, or conversely, to what degree colonial control was accepted at the village level, as a result of the use of these leading figures. Matsumoto Takenori argued that several elements made possible the establishment of the hegemonic rule of colonial power during the wartime period. First, villages’ forced assumption of a communal responsibility for the achievement of wartime mobilization goals during the final period of Japanese colonial rule had the effect of creating an emphasis on a collective spirit that can best be described as ‘for the village.’ Furthermore, motivation was generated by providing those villages that met the expectations of the colonial authority with special, or priority, distribution status. Finally, the implementation of a rural reform policy that was rooted in the concepts of scientism and modernism had the effect of greatly enhancing the influence of the above-mentioned leading figures, who constituted the main actors in the spread of the privatization ideology and were the core advocates of the structural modernization of agriculture. Unlike Matsumoto, Yun Hae-dong argued that the assumption of the responsibility for wartime mobilization under the highly oppressive mobilization system by the *kujang*, which he described as individuals who while having the characteristics of leading figures did not have any authority vis-à-vis the villagers, resulted in conflicts emerging between these *kujang* and villagers. This in turn had the effect of further deepening the contradictions inherent in the dual structure of village governance.
The wartime mobilization system as highly coercive and full-scale total war mechanism inevitably resulted in the peasants having greater difficulty preserving their autonomous spheres and maintaining a distance from the colonial policies. Furthermore, the claim that the fact that the communal solidarity of villages was intricately associated by the colonial power with communal village responsibility as part of the latter’s village-level wartime mobilization policy helped to facilitate the incorporation of villages into the colonial control system, is also not without its merits. Nevertheless, many cases have been discovered in which the authority of traditional local influentials that had never been captured by bureaucratic control continued to exist even during the final period of Japanese colonialism. Moreover, the foundation of the hegemonic control identified by Matsumoto Takenori can also be called into question. Doubts can be raised about the effects of the actual power and rural reform policy implemented under the wartime mobilization system. The majority of communal working groups which were supported by colonial government based on the ideology of ‘for the village’ were disorganized after liberation, and that the kujang lost control over their villages after liberation. Considering these aspects, the wartime mobilization system can be said to have possessed the characteristics of violent rather than hegemonic control. Of course, attention should be focused on the fact that the total mobilizing organizations penetrated into the internal village structure (village league and patriotic units) during the final period of Japanese colonialism were revived and used after liberation as a mechanism through which to effectively mobilize the people in building the nation state, and even in the conflicts between the left and right. However, the fact that these organizations were backed by a coercive wartime mobilization system and that colonial rule over the people was regarded as being non-legitimate should not be ignored.

Modern Changes within the Internal Order of Village

Earlier studies focused on the fact that the tonggye were replaced by
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rural revitalization center during the Rural Revitalization Campaign of the 1930s, which resulted in the tonggye-centered autonomous village order being dismantled in favor of rural revitalization center–centered bureaucratic order. However, recent studies have paid attention to the fact that although villages were incorporated into the colonial power’s influence area, their autonomy and autonomous order remained intact. Nevertheless, questions remain about the actual state of village autonomy, and the relationship between the tonggye and government-led organizations. To this end, wider perceptions that are based on several case studies should be developed.

My own analysis of the Ōsō-ri Tonggye in Changhŭng-kun, Chŏnnam Province revealed that the tonggye had in fact continued to exist throughout the colonial period as the central organization in terms of village autonomy. However, the spread of colonial modernity resulted in modern changes being introduced to the management of the tonggye. One example is that of the position of chŏnyusa (錢有司) from whom loans could be secured from the tonggye. As the majority of villagers were entitled to receive small loans during the 19th century, villagers freely took turns becoming the chŏnyusa. However, the fact during the colonial period that only a few rich farmers were able to receive large loans all but ensured that the position of chŏnyusa was only assigned to specific individuals that emanated from their ranks. Moreover, the positions in charge of the management of tonggye were increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few influentials during the colonial period. These changes can be regarded as a sign of the enhancement of modern rationality in that they helped to heighten the ability to collect loans, and strengthened the efficiency of the management of the tonggye. On the other hand, these moves were also designed to weaken the communal order of the village and to install a hierarchal and powerful mechanism through which to manage the tonggye.24 The financial management of the kye also exhibited modern changes, such as the change from simple reproduction to expansive reproduction, and the advent of the joint sale of labor through the advent of communal labor.25
As such, the colonial period saw some modern changes introduced in the management of the traditional autonomous village organization known as the tonggye. Nevertheless, the tonggye were never rendered extinct and never became bureaucratized. While these entities were in some ways reestablished during the colonial period, they either co-existed with government-led organizations, such as the rural revitalization centers, or took on the external trappings of a government-led organization while continuing to function as the network hub that connected the various organizations within the village together. Given this reality, it becomes necessary to reappraise deliberately the validity of assertions such as the following: “The rural order during the Japanese colonial period underwent a transformation from the Korean style-kye to Japanese style-unions.” However, the study of the tonggye and village autonomy during the colonial period remains in its infancy. In this regard, issues such as those related to the principles of tonggye management, the relationship between the tonggye and other organizations within the village, the relationship between the tonggye and general meeting of the villagers known as the tongghoe, as well the characteristics of village autonomy after the disorganization of the tonggye, must also be addressed as we move forward.

Traditional Elements within Villages and Colonial Modernity

Despite the progression of colonial modernity, little attention has been paid in existing studies to the issue of how so called ‘traditions’ such as the traditional practices and value system that existed within the village should be viewed. Although they view the characteristics of villages during the late Chosŏn dynasty and the Japanese colonial periods in opposite manners, ‘colonial exploitation’ and ‘colonial modernization,’ which constitute the two main theories used to approach the Japanese colonial period, are both based on a modernism-based perception framework which presume single-track development from premodernity to modernity. As a result, existing studies revolving around these
Theories have tended to regard traditional elements as negative factors that eventually disappeared as modernity progressed. For its part, the theory of ‘colonial modernity,’ which while being critical to modernity perceives coloniality and modernity in an integrated manner, has also been unable to overcome this problem. The theory of colonial modernity views modernity in a critical manner, and as something that should be overcome. However, in terms of its perception of historical facts, it also views the modernity (instrumental rationality and disciplinary power) that developed under colonial rule as having spread throughout the entire society. In this regard, the studies of villages during the Japanese colonial period that have been based on the theory of colonial modernity have either eschewed the examination of ‘traditional elements’ altogether, or ambiguously lumped them together as ‘communal’ factors.

In this regard, special attention should be paid to the important issues raised in the recent study conducted by Matsumoto Takenori and Chung Seungjin. In this paper, they sharply criticized the fact that the focus of the studies on villages and peasants in the modern era located on the modern locus of control created by the colonial authority in villages, or on modern development and growth during this period, has resulted in the spiritual world and cultural characteristics of agrarian society being left outside of researchers scope of interest. They delved into the reasons why the image of Korean villages during the colonial period as ‘closed communities’ was formed despite the fact that they were opened up to the external world and modern order. According to these two researchers, Korean peasants under the colonial rule possessed a value structure and social ethics (ethos) that could not easily be adjusted to the colonial power’s coercively implemented social mobilization campaign (destruction of traditional values and creation of a new order). The peasants’ refusal of modernization can be said to have been rooted in cultural factors. The strong nature of the social mobilization policy, which effectively dwarfed the drive to create a modern commercial economy, caused the relative isolation of rural areas that lay well outside of the sphere of urbanization and modernization. The result of this phenomenon was the formation of
‘part-society with part-culture’ in rural areas during the Japanese colonial period. This ‘little tradition’ that developed among peasants was not an essential substantiality, but rather a sort of invented tradition. The act of ‘creating tradition’ represented by the kye (village associations), hyangyak (village code), and chokpo (genealogy documents), functioned as a buffer in terms of the modernization and social mobilization of peasants. It also reflected the fact that the independent culture of the peasants had not been dismantled by the penetration of market economy and disciplinary power. The opportunity to discover and reproduce this tradition can be regarded as having been provided by the joint intervention of local influentials, peasants, and the colonial power, albeit in different ways. To be more specific, the local influentials (local landlords and traditional intellectuals) who were excluded from the official local administrative structure and had their status degraded to that of objects of mobilization, sought to emphasize traditional values and ethical norms rooted in the Confucian ideology during the process of resisting against the new intellectuals (local administrative officials). Meanwhile, the poor peasants sought to maintain their existence by using elements of the traditional order, such as the ‘pressure of equality’ rooted in the notion of ‘share of poverty’ as the basis for their calls for the establishment of a moral economy. Finally, the colonial power used traditional elements such as the hyangyak and tonggye as a social mobilization implement. As such, while rural society in Korea during the colonial period shares a certain commonness or contemporaneity with rural society in Japan, in that it was an ‘open society’ for the external world and modern order, it also stands apart from its counterpart in Japan in that it cultivated an image of a ‘closed community.’ The combination of this contemporaneity and gradualness (delay and slowness) can be identified as one of the characteristics of colonial modernity.

The theories introduced above of course remain at the exploratory stage. However, they suggest a logical and methodological framework that can be used to perceive colonial modernity as a social and cultural phenomenon created through the communal interactions between a three-tier hierarchy
composed of ‘colonial power- mid-level members of the ruling class- peasants.’ Moreover, under this framework, the traditional elements at work within the village during the colonial period are not regarded as being essential nature. If this logic is further developed, the relationship between tradition and modernity would no longer be perceived from the standpoint of a dichotomy or mono-linear transitional process, but rather as an amalgamation achieved from the standpoint of the ‘modern composition (reproduction) of tradition’ or of the ‘tradition embeded in modernity.’ However, the traditional practices and communal order in rural society during the Japanese colonial period should not be perceived and not as an ambiguous notion characterized by the image of a closed community, but rather as part of the suprastructure not just corresponding one-on-one to the substructure. In short, the perception of colonial modernity can be deepened by understanding the traditional elements and autonomous lifestyle evident in the everyday lives of the peasants from the standpoint of the people’s history or cultural history, or what can be referred to as ‘history from the bottom up’.33

Suggestion for the Future Studies

In this final section, I would like to introduce the desirable direction for the studies on the Korean villages during the Japanese colonial period, namely the ‘bottom-up approach,’ and the deepening of the study of colonial modernity based on this approach.

First, the materials and methods needed to facilitate the application of the bottom-up approach on villages must be uncovered and developed. In terms of materials, there is a marked shortage of documents of the village level; moreover, those that do exist have not been collected systemically. As a result, it becomes necessary to carry out critical interpretations of the researches on villages conducted by the colonial authority.34 In many cases, existing studies have either ignored the materials produced by the colonial government in the name of ‘anti-colonial history’ or conversely unconditionally used these materials because they are perceived as
reflecting the reality of the past. To this end, there is a need to make critical use of the materials related to the research on villages during the Japanese colonial period, and to further develop the amount of documents produced by villagers through field studies and interviews with local residents in order to analyze the actual state of the internal village and the experiences of local people whose experiences differed from those of the colonial authority.\textsuperscript{35} Next, from a methodological standpoint, the case studies on the village level should be expanded in quantity and be improved in quality. The great majority of documents used in existing studies have emanated from \textit{yangban} clan villages. In this regard, it needs to search for methods to classify and generalize case studies. This can be done by analyzing various types of villages such as \textit{yangban} villages and commoner villages, kinship-based villages and multi-clan villages from the standpoint of elements such as social status and kinship, as well as the geographical and ecological characteristics of villages. Additional emphasis should be placed on the interactions between the internal order of villages and the external world by expanding the standpoint of field and case studies from ‘research about villages’ to ‘research in villages.’\textsuperscript{36}

Second, there is an urgent need to expand the scope of study in both a temporal and spatial aspects and to actively search to bring about the theorization of colonial modernity. Such an exercise should be conducted as part of efforts to deepen the discussions on colonial modernity through the study of villages during the Japanese colonial period. Above all, a historical time zone that covers late Chosŏn dynasty, the Japanese colonial period, and the post-liberation era should be introduced, thereby moving beyond the inherent limitations of focusing the temporal scope exclusively on the colonial period. As mentioned above, such a move is needed in order to overcome the limits of exclusively focusing on colonial modernity, and by association of excluding premodern experiences; actively analyze the complicated relationship between tradition and modernity; and further to explore the trend of the continuation of colonial modernity even during the post-colonial process. In addition, instead of limiting the spatial scope of research only to the colonial Korea, it is
necessary to extend the gaze to Japan and its colony (Chosŏn), and further, to engage in comparative studies of colonies, as well as of the relations between them. Ultimately, it needs to contribute to the issue of how ‘colonial modernity’ should be conceptualized in a theoretical manner based on the above studies.

**Keywords**: village, internal order of village, tonggye, control and autonomy, tradition and modernity, colonial modernity, bottom-up approach

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**Notes**:

1 Yang Hoesu, “Han’guk nongch’on sahoeŭi kujojŏk pyŏndong (Structural changes within Korean agricultural society)” in Han’guk sahoehak (Korean Journal of Sociology), Vol. 10 (1976), 57; Choi Jaeseok, Han’guk nongch’on sahoe yŏn’gu (Study of Korean Rural Society), (Ilchisa, 1975), 59; Lee Moon-jong, “Ch’ŏllak chirihak 50 nyŏnŭi hoegowa chŏnmang (Retrospect of 50 years of geographic studies on villages and the future outlook thereof)” in Taehan chiri hakhoe chi (Journal of Korean Geography), Vol. 31-2 (1996), 224.

2 National Institute of Korean History, Han’guksa; Chosŏn hugiŭi sahoe (Korean History: The Society of Late Chosŏn), Vol. 34 (1995); Lee Haejun, Chosŏn sidae ch’ŏllak sahoesa (The History of Rural Society in Chosŏn), (Minjok munhwasa, 1996); Jung Jinyoung, Chosŏn sidae hyangch’ŏn sahoesa (The history of local society in Chosŏn), (Hangilsa, 1997).

3 Zensho Eisuke, 朝鮮の聚落 (Village of Chosŏn), The Government-General of Chosŏn (1933•1935).

4 Suzuki Eitaro, 朝鮮農村社會の研究 (Study of the Rural Society of Chosŏn), (Miraisha, 1973).

5 In 1914, the colonial government attempted to reorganize the administrative districts by abolishing and integrating certain counties (kun), townships
(myŏn), and villages (tong and ri, of tongni). As a result, it reduced the number of tongni, which served as sub-administrative units of the myŏn, from 64,000 to 28,000 nationwide. While the existing tongni that had been established prior to the reorganization of administrative districts in 1914 were referred to as kudongni (old village) the newly established administrative tongni were known as sindongni (new village). According to Zensho Eisuke, kudongni was composed of an average of 51 households, and contained 2-3 natural villages. (Kim Ikhan, “植民地期朝鮮における地方支配體制の構築過程と農村社会変動 (The establishment of the local control system and the changes wrought to rural society during the Japanese colonial period)”, PhD dissertation, Tokyo University (1996), 14-26.

6 Many such studies have been carried out in the fields of sociology and anthropology. Examples include Yang Hoesu, Han’guk nongch’onūi ch’ŏlak kujo (The Structure of Rural Areas in Korea), Asiatic Research Institute, Korea University (1967); Lee Mangap, Han’guk nongch’on sahoeūi kujowa pyŏnhwa (The Structure of Rural Society in Korea and Changes Therein), (Seoul National University Press, 1973); Choi Jae-seok, Han’guk nongch’on sahoe yŏn’gu (Rural Society in Korea), (Ilchisa, 1975); Kim Teak-kyu, Ssijok purakūi kujo yŏn’gu (The Structure of the Clan Village), (Ilchogak, 1979).

7 Please refer to Endnote 2.

8 Examples of such studies include Lee Hana, “1910-32 nyŏn ilche’ŭi chosŏn nongch’on chaep yŏn’guw mobŏm purak (The reorganization of rural villages and the ‘Model Village’ movement (1910-32))”, Master’s Degree Thesis, Department of History, Yonsei University (1994); Kim Ikhan, “植民地期朝鮮における地方支配體制の構築過程と農村社會變動 (The establishment of the local control system and changes in rural society during the Japanese colonial period)”, PhD dissertation, Tokyo University (1996); Gi-Wook Shin and Do-Hyun Han, "Colonial Corporatism: The Rural Revitalization Campaign, 1932~40", Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson, eds., Colonial Modernity in Korea, (Harvard Univ. Press, 1999); Kim Younhee, Ilche sidae nongch’on t’ongje chŏngch’ae k yŏn’gu (The Rural Control Policy during the Japanese Colonial Period), (Kyŏngin munhwasa, 2003).

Based on study materials related to the tonggye during the Japanese colonial era, this pioneer study was one of the first to analyze the tonggye which continued to function as autonomous village organizations even during the Japanese colonial period. However, the inherent limitations of the viewpoint known as ‘colonial exploitation’ evident in this study resulted in him reaching the conclusion that the autonomous order had been disorganized and replaced by a government-led order implemented by the Japanese colonial authorities.

As far as the studies on the Japanese colonial government’s rural control policy during the early stages is concerned, special attention should be paid to the following two studies, each of which has its own position and contexts. First, Gi-Wook Shin and Do-Hyun Han, who analyzed the Rural Revitalization Campaign based on the notion of colonial corporatism, raised the issue of hegemonic control, thereby moving beyond the trend of unilaterally emphasizing the oppressive nature of colonial policy. For his part, Kim Ikhan, who used various materials related to the field surveys conducted by the colonial government, focused on the status of kudongni unit as a village community. Kim’s connection of the change in the leadership within rural society to the social movements in rural area has important implications for future studies.


2 Matsumoto Takenori used the term, “privatization ideology” to indicate the concept that poverty was an individual rather than structural problem. (Matsumoto Takenori, ibid, 162).

3 Yun Hae-dong, Chibaewa chachI –singminjigi ch’ollakūi samgukmyŏn kuyo (Control and Autonomy- The Triple Structure of Villages during the Colonial Period ), (Yŏksa pip’yŏngsa, 2006).


5 The recent discovery of various documents related to villages which were produced during the 19th-20th centuries has led to the publication of numerous case studies which explore the changes that took place within villages during the transitional period to modernity. In addition, there has been a trend
towards comprehensive surveys and research on various characteristics of villages. These studies have been carried out in the form of joint research amongst scholars from various fields, in particular sociology. In addition to the two studies mentioned in this paper, other examples include Chung Seungjin, “Naju ch’odong tonggye’ui changgi chisokkwa pyŏn’hw, 1601-2001 (The long history of the Naju Ch’odong Village Association and changes therein: 1601-2001)” in Taedong munhwa yŏng’gu (Journal of East Asian Studies), Vol. 54 (2006); Kim Kuentae, “Chosŏn hugi- ilche sigi chŏnt’ŏng tongsŏng ch’ŏllak’ŭi pyŏn’hwasang –Chŏllado namwŏn tundongni sarye (Changes in the traditional clan village during late Chosŏn – Japanese colonial period: With a special focus on the case of Namwŏn Tundŏk-ri, Chŏlla Province)” in Taedong munhwa yŏng’gu (Journal of East Asian Studies), Vol. 62 (2008); Kim Il-chul et al., Chŏngjok maŭl’ŭi chŏnt’ŏnggywa pyŏn’hw (Tradition and Change within the Clan village), (Paeksan sŏdang, 1998); Jung Keun sik et al., Kurim yŏng’gu- maŭl kongdôngch’ŭi kujowa pyŏndong (Study of Kurim Village –The Structure of the Village Community and Changes Therein), (Kyŏngin munhwasa, 2003).

As far as monograph of villages are concerned, attention should be paid to the Korean Village Research Team of Chungnam National University, Ch’ungnam chiyŏk maŭlji ch’ongsŏ series (Series on Villages in the Chungnam Area), (Taewŏnsa, 2006-2008).

16 Rhee Younghoon, “18 · 19 segi taejŏriŭi sinbun kusŏnggywa chach’l chilsŏ (The structure of the social status and autonomous orders in Taejŏ-ri during the 18th -19th century)” in Matchilŭi nongmindił (The Farmers of Matchil), (Ilchogak, 2001).

17 Rhee Younghoon emphasized the fact that the various village associations (kye) were not limited to the sphere of the village, but rather organized in a multi-layered manner and at various spheres and levels. Rhee asserted that the removal of these networks and associations would have resulted in transforming villages into nothing more than an amalgamation of residential areas, farmland, and forests. However, this extreme assertion can be regarded as a unilateral opinion which rejects out of hand the established perception of villages as a social unit or community. The extreme nature of the claim regarding the effect of the removal of the networks and associations offers little in terms of the future study of characteristics of villages. Furthermore, even though these various associations (kye) existed in a multi-layered manner,
and in many ways beyond the scope of the village, it should be remembered that it was in fact villages that served as the units and centers from which such various associations took root. These shortcomings are also evident in Rhee’s ‘19th century Tajō-ri model’ used to schematize the structure of these multi-layered associations. (Rhee Younghoon, ibid, 282).

18 Rhee Younghoon, “Ch’ongsŏl: chosŏn hugi kyŏngjesa yŏn’guī saerum tonghyanggwa kwaje (Outline: New trends in the study of the economic history of late Chosŏn and future tasks)” in Suryang kyŏngjesaro tasi pon chosŏn hugi (Late Chosŏn as Viewed through Economic History), (Seoul National University Press, 2004).

19 In terms of the argument that the village order was unilaterally reorganized by the colonial power, Rhee Younghoon’s study can be said to share many similarities with earlier studies on villages during the Japanese colonial period. However, while earlier studies, which approached the issue from the standpoint of colonial exploitation, asserted that this change took the form of the replacement of an autonomous order with government-led order (degradation), Rhee, who tackled the matter from the standpoint of colonial modernization, asserted that the change was in reality a progression from the premodern social class-based order (yangban-oriented order) to the modern bureaucratic or commoner-oriented order (development). In this sense, the theories of colonial exploitation and colonial modernization can be regarded as having isomorphic logic structure.


21 The trend towards the replacement of the local influential who served as kujang, or core mid-level members of the village ruling class, with leading figures during the period in which the wartime mobilization system was also evident in my case studies of Ich’ŏn in Kyŏnggi Province and Changhŭng in Chŏnnam Province. (Lee Yong-ki, “1940-50 nyŏndaeh nongch’ŏnŭi ma’il chilsŏwa kukka –kyŏnggido ich’ŏn’ŭi ŏn’ŭi chipsŏngch’ŏn saryerŭl chungsimiuro (The village order in rural areas and the state during the 1940s -50s: with a special focus on the case of a clan village in Ich’ŏn, Kyŏnggi Province)” in


The Chŏnggang ilgi (定岡日記) penned by a Confucian scholar from Kwanji-ri, Yongsan-myon, Changhŭng-kun in Chŏnnam Province contains a passage in which the author, a member of the traditional local influentials, tells the head of his village that all village heads (kujang) within the myŏn (township) level should take resolute action of general resignation as a means to resist against the unreasonable distribution practices of the colonial authority (August 29, 1942). Furthermore, in 1943, traditional local influentials from the same township were able to take collective action against the heavy-handed practice of local administration that eventually resulted in the myŏnjang (head of township) acquiescing to their demands. (Lee Yong-ki, “Ilchesik myŏn tanwi yuryŏkch’aŭ kusŏnggwa chiyŏk tanwi – chŏnnam changhŭng-kun yongsan-myon saryerūl chungsimŭro (The composition of local influentials at the township level and regional politics during the Japanese colonial period –with a special focus on the case of Yongsan-myŏn, Changhŭng-kun in Chŏnnam Province)” in Taedong munhwa yŏn’gu (Journal of East Asian Studies), Vol. 67 (2009), 69-71.

Although caution should be exercised not to engage in generalizations, the retraditionalization phenomenon that emerged in rural areas during the 1950s in the aftermath of the Korean War did in fact result in the influence of traditional local influentials being strengthened. To this end, the authority and power of traditional local influentials within rural society and village units during the final period of Japanese colonialism should not be overlooked. (Kang In-cheol, Han’gu chŏnjaenggwac sahoe ûisik mit munhwat’ui pyŏnhwa (The Korean War and changes in social awareness and culture) in Han’gu chŏnjaenggwac sahoe kujot’ui pyŏnhwa (The Korean War and Changes in the Social Structure), The Academy of Korean Studies, (Paeksan, 1999).

23 My case study of Ich’ŏn in Kyŏnggi Province found that the communal working groups organized during the final period of Japanese colonial rule were very efficient because they involved the input of collective labor. However, the significant differences in terms of the size of the farmland owned by the individual members of these communal working groups made it difficult to calculate wages that reflected the individual labor that had been input. As a result, these groups were dissolved right after liberation (Lee
Yong-ki, ibid (2003), 152). In the case of Ich’ŏn Village, the person who had held the position of kujang during the period in which the wartime mobilization system was in place resigned immediately after liberation. Although not all the kujang in all the villages were sacked after liberation, no cases of kujang during the colonial period having wielded power or authority over villagers in the liberated spaces have to date been reported.

24 Lee Yong-ki, ibid (2007), 199-207.
26 Jung Keunsik et al., “Kurim yŏn’gu- mail kongdongche’ui kujowa pyŏndong (Study of Kurim Village – The Structure of Village Communities and Changes Therein), (Kyŏngin munhwa, 2003), 272-277; Lee Yong-ki, ibid (2007), 182-190.
27 Rhee Younghoon, ibid (2001), 293.
28 For more on general studies related to the various types of village autonomy and the characteristics of tonggye as an autonomous village organization, please refer to Lee Yong-ki, ibid (2007), 150-157.
29 For criticism of the belief that the theories of colonial exploitation and colonial modernization both boast modernism-based viewpoint despite their contrary assertions, please refer to Bae Sungjun, “Singminji kŏndaehwa nonjaengie han’gye chijŏme sŏsŏ (The limitations of the debate over ‘colonial modernization’)” in Tangdae pip’yŏng (Journal of Contemporary Criticism), Vol. 13 (2000).
30 For more on the theory of ‘colonial modernity,’ which emerged as a proverbial third way in terms of the perception of the colony, please refer to Matsumoto Takenori, “序章: 研究史の整理と課題の提示 (Preface: Summary and future historical research tasks)” in Ch’ŏlmin’gyo ch’ŏlmin’gyo gwa chŏnch’ŏlmin’gyo wŏn’gu (The paradox of colonial modernity in Korea)” in Singminji i’lsang, chibae wa kyun’go (Daily Life in the Colony: Control and Crevices), Kong Jae-wook and Jung Keunsik, (Munhwa kwahaksa, 2006); Yun Hae-dong, Singminji kŏndaehwa paradox (The Paradox of Colonial Modernity), (Humanist, 2007).
For a critical analysis of these studies, please refer to Cho Kyoyngdal, “植民地近代性論批判 (Criticism of the theory of colonial modernity)” in 植民地期朝鮮の知識人と民衆 (Intellectuals and the People during the Japanese Colonial Era), (Yushisha, 2008).

31 Matsumoto Takenori and Yun Haedong, who can be regarded as the two leading researchers on villages during the Japanese colonial period in terms of approaching the matter from the standpoint of colonial modernity, have viewed villages as a sphere in which modern hegemony and traditional customs competed with one another. However, Matsumoto’s claims that as modernity was “widely viewed among the majority of Koreans, who did not directly experience the disciplinary power mechanism, public culture, or modern media, to be a superior, desirable, and even enjoyable outcome,” resulted in colonial modernity being “established as a form of hegemony among Koreans under the colonial situation.” (Matsumoto Takenori, ibid (2005), 27); and Yun’s statement to the effect that, “Viewed from the standpoint of the modern ethos, rural areas and remote, mountainous areas proved to be no exception to this rule. The colony was full of modern people, or beings subjected to the disciplinary power, who desired modernity.” (Yun Hae-dong, ibid (2007) 62-63), raise questions about the logic of their arguments regarding the expansion of modernity, and the establishment of hegemony during the colonial period.


33 Studies have been conducted recently that have sought to analyze the value structure and lifestyles of the people who were not unilaterally incorporated into the modernity/power structure from the standpoint of the people’s history. Based on his analysis of people’s movements at the end of the 19th century,
Bae Hangseob stressed the fact that the people at the time possessed an independent rationale that cannot simply be reduced to modernity or anti-modernity. (Bae Hangseob, “Kǔndaе ihaеnggi minjung ǔisik – kǔndaewa pan’gǔndaeǔi nŏmŏ (The consciousness of the public during the transition to modernity – Moving beyond modernity and anti-modernity)” in Yŏksa munje yŏn’gu (Korean Journal of Historical Studies), Vol. 23 (2010)).

For his part, based on his analysis of the consistent references made to the calculating of the value of items in yŏpchŏn (Korean brass coin) units, which was different from the modern and official currency system, found in documents related to people’s everyday lives, Lee Yong-ki revealed that the autonomous value structure and lifestyle of the people continued to exist even during the Japanese colonial period. (Lee Yong-ki, “Singminjigi minjungûi sembŏpkwa chayuljŏk saenghwal segye –saenghwal munsŏu ē kwap’ye kirokûl ònghayŏ (The people’s currency calculation methods and their ‘autonomous’ lifestyle during the Japanese colonial period –based on the currency-related records found in documents pertaining to everyday life)” in Yŏksa munje yŏn’gu (Korean Journal of Historical Studies), Vol. 23 (2010)).

Meanwhile, Cho Hyung keun focused on the fact that traditional practices such as the kiuje (rituals for rain) for the relocation of markets conducted as part of the traditional responses to droughts forced the colonial authority, which had billed itself as the ‘main actors of enlightenment,’ faced the dilemma of having to implement ‘unscientific governance.’ Cho described in an interesting manner how the traditional practices of the Korean public contributed to laying bare the limitations of the modern colonial power. (Cho Hyung Keun, “Sijang ijŏn kiuje p’ungsûpkwa singmin kwŏll’yŏkûi han ŏge chijŏm (The marketplace relocation kiuje and the limitations of colonial power)” in Sahoewa yŏksa (Society and History), Vol. 80 (2008)).

34 Bak Hyon su can be regarded as one of those authors who has extensively dealt with the surveys of villages carried out by the Japanese colonial government (Bak Hyon su, “Ilcheŭi chosŏn chosae kwanhan yŏn’gu (Surveys of Chosŏn conducted by the Japanese colonial authorities)”, PhD Dissertation, Anthropology Department, Seoul National University (1993)).

Numerous relevant researches and studies, including those conducted by Zensho Eisuke and Suzuki Eitaro, have yet to be reviewed in a full-scale manner. Recently, studies which have paid attention to the fact that research on the traditional customs and actual state of colony carried out by the
Japanese colonial authority tended to combine traditional customs and the actual state within the colony with the policymaking intentions of the colonial authority. Examples of such studies include, Yang Hyeona, “Singminji sigi han’guk kajokpŏpŭi kwansŭppŏpŭi kwansŭp munje (1)-sigan úisikŭi siljongŭl chungsimŭiro” (Korean family law-related customs during the colonial period (1) – with a special focus on the disappearance of the consciousness of time)” in Sahoewa yŏksa (Society and History), Vol. 58 (2000); Sim Hui Gi, “Ilche kangjŏm ch’ogî singminji kwansŭppŏpŭi hyŏngsŏng (The formation of customary law during the early stages of Japanese colonialism)” in Pŏpsahak yŏn’gu (Journal of Law Studies), Vol. 28 (2003); Lee Yong-ki, “Ilcheŭi tonggye chosawa singminjuŭijŏk sisŏn (The research on Tonggye conducted by the Japanese colonial government and the colonial gaze)” in Sarim (Historical Review), Vol. 31 (2008); Bae Sungjun, “Tŏnggambu sigi kwansŭp chosawa t’ŏjgwŏn kwansŭpŭi ch’angch’il (The research on traditional customs during the era of the Residency-General and the creation of land rights)” in Sarim (Historical Review), Vol. 33 (2009).

Examples of studies which have combined the materials produced by the Government-General of Chosŏn, local documents prepared at the village level as well as field studies, include Kim Younghee, Ilche sigi nongch’ŏn t’ongje chŏngch’aek yŏn’gu (Study of the Rural Control Policy during the Japanese Colonial Era), (Kyŏngin munhwasa, 2003), 408-517; Lee Yong-ki, “Ilche sigi mobŏm purakăi naemyŏn’gwa kŭ kiŏk (The memory of model villages during the Japanese colonial period)” in Han’guksa hakpo (Journal for the Study of Korean History), Vol. 38 (2010).

Clifford Geertz has argued that while ‘research on villages’ simply views villages as a subject for research, ‘research in villages’ perceives villages as a research methodology that begins from the village and extends beyond its border to wider contexts, and to a theoretically wider gaze and logic. (Kim Chang-min, “Ma’il chosawa yŏn’gwe taehan pi’phanumeric’gwa sŏngch’il (Critical review of the research and studies on villages)” in Han’guk minsokhak (Journal of Korean Folklore), Vol. 147 (2008), 16).

Although the field is still in its infancy, comparative studies on villages in Korea and Japan have recently begun to be conducted. Such comparative studies, as well as comparative studies involving Taiwan and Vietnam, which while belonging to the Confucian culture zone like Korea, were colonized by Japan and a Western country respectively, should be expanded. Furthermore,
there is a need to move beyond comparative studies and focus on the history of empires or transnational history.
For more on the possibility of expanding the scope of analysis to the history of empires and transnational history, please refer to Yun Hae-dong, “Transnational history ŭi kanŭngsŏng -han’guk kūndaesŏl chungsimŭro (The potential of transnational history – centering on Korean modern history)” in Yŏksa hakpo (Journal of History), Vol. 200 (2008).
38 For more on the theorization of colonial modernity, please refer to Cho Hyung Keun, “Kūndaesŏngŭi naejae han’ŭn oeburosŏ singminsŏng/ singminjijŏk ch’aiwa pyŏniŭi munje (Coloniality/ colonial differences as external factors of modernity and the issue of variations) in Sahoewa yŏksa (Society and History), Vol. 73 (2007).
Cho summarized the theoretical difficulties which the discourse on colonial modernity has faced, and suggested a groundbreaking framework ‘with which to perceive the coloniality which existed as an external factor of modernity.’
(Abstract)

The Study of Korean Villages during the Japanese Colonial Period and Colonial Modernity

Lee Yong-ki

This study reviews trends in the study of Korean villages during the Japanese colonial period. Such an exercise is carried out in order to summarize the research-related issues that have emerged over time, and to suggest a desirable future direction for this particular field of study. Villages were the basic units in which peasants’ everyday lives unfolded, and the lowest unit in terms of the state’s governance of its people. They served as dynamic spaces in which the autonomy of the people and the governance of the state encountered and came into conflict with one another. In this respect, the study of Korean villages during the Japanese colonial period makes it possible to perceive colonial modernity from the bottom-up viewpoint. More to the point, this can be achieved by analyzing the relationships between ‘control and autonomy’ and ‘tradition and modernity’ that took form amidst the people’s everyday lives.

The studies of villages during the Japanese colonial period, a field which started to come into its own during the 1990s, have been conducted as part of the wider study of the colonial government’s rural control policy. However, recent studies have moved beyond the field of the history of policy and approached villages from the standpoint of social history. As earlier studies tended to focus on villages from the standpoint of policy history, villages were in effect regarded as the objects of the colonial control policy. Moreover, the predominance of the colonial exploitation approach resulted in the autonomous order of villages being regarded as having been reconstructed and distorted into the government-led order by the colonial authority. Meanwhile, the recent studies have sought to identify the characteristics of colonial modernity, including the possibility of autonomous
actions and choices on the part of the peasants, from the standpoint of the tension between the colonial authority and villagers. Some of the issues which have been raised in recent studies that have critically perceived the modality and characteristics of colonial modernity carried out from the standpoint of the criticism of modernity include: 1) the degree of penetration degree and characteristics of colonial control over villages, 2) the changes in the internal order of villages and extent thereof, 3) the characteristics of the traditional elements which existed in villages despite the advancement of colonial modernity. This study reviewed these issues and introduced two elements that should be part of the future direction of this field, namely the use of a bottom-up approach and the deepening of the perception of colonial modernity based on this bottom-up approach. In addition, detailed matters related to the implementation of this direction were also discussed.
일제시기 촌락 연구와 식민지근대

이용기(상극관대학교 동아시아학술원 연구교수)

이 글은 일제시기 촌락에 관한 연구 동향을 검토하여 연구사적 쟁점을 정리하고 향후 연구의 방향을 제시하려는 것이다. 촌락은 농민들의 일상적 삶의 기초단위이자 국가의 대민지배의 최하위 단위로서 민중의 자율성과 국가의 지배가 만나고 부딪히는 역동적 공간이다. 따라서 일제시기 촌락에 관한 연구를 통해 민중의 일상적 삶의 레벨에 형성된 ‘지배와 자치’, ‘전통과 근대’의 관계를 파악함으로써 ‘아래로부터’의 관점에서 식민지근대를 이해할 수 있을 것이다.

1990년대 이후 활발해진 일제시기 촌락에 관한 연구는 초기에는 일제의 농촌지배정책 연구에서 부분적으로 다루어지다가 최근에는 정책서 분야에 한정되지 않고 사회사적 접근으로 확장되고 있다. 초기의 연구는 정책사적 접근이 두드러졌기 때문에 촌락이 식민지배정책의 대상으로서만 다루어졌고, ‘식민지수탈론’의 관점이 강하여 전통적인 촌락의 자치질서가 일제에 의해 관리질서로 재편·왜곡된다고 이해하였다. 반면에 최근의 연구는 농촌층의 자율적 행위와 전략의 가능성을 시야에 넣고 식민권력과 촌락의 건강 관계를 통해 식민지근대의 성격을 밝히고자 한다. 근대비판의 관점에서 촌락 연구를 통해 식민지근대의 양상과 특성을 비판적으로 이해하려는 최근 연구에서는 ① 촌락에 대한 식민지배의 관점 정도와 성격, ② 촌락 내부질서의 변화 양상과 정도, ③ 식민지근대의 전전 속에서도 촌락에 존속되는 전통적 요소의 성격 등이 쟁점이었다. 이 글에서는 이러한 문제를 검토하면서 ‘아래로부터’의 접근과 이를 통한 식민지근대 인식의 심화라는 두 가지를 앞으로의 촌락 연구 방향으로 제시하고, 그것을 수행하기 위한 구체적인 문제들을 찾아보았다.