A New Controversy over Korea’s Modernization during
the Colonial Period Viewed from a Perspective of the
Regional Agricultural History

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Foreword

In his recently published book Ilche ch’ogi Chosŏn üi nongŏp
[Agriculture of Chosŏn (Joseon) during the Early Days of Japanese
Colonial Period], Huh Sooyoul (Hŏ Suyŏl) focuses on Korea’s agriculture
in the 1910s. He criticizes those who hold the view that the country’s
agriculture developed during the colonial period (i.e. that colonial rule
contributed to the modernization of the colony).¹ He points out that the
estimation made for the 1910s by ‘those with a view that Japanese
colonial rule contributed to the modernization of Chosŏn’ (“the colonial
rule supporters” hereinafter) is overblown, like the estimation made by
Mizoguchi Toshiyuki (溝口敏行).² The colonial rule supporters noted the
trend of “straight sharp growth” in the 1911-1918 period, i.e. the early
colonial period. Huh Sooyoul questions, “Was there really a special
reason for such rapid growth of the Korean economy?”³ He says that the
level of the country’s agricultural production in the 1911-1918 period
should be underestimated by extending the trend line to the 1918-1926
period.

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In Chapter 3 of his book, Huh points out, “The colonial rule supporters viewed the Pyŏkkolche (Byeokgolje) embankment as a tidal embankment. They viewed the plains down below the embankment as a tidal flat or reclaimed rice paddies. In the process, they underestimated the development in the country’s conventional farming methods and overestimated the development in the Japanese colonist-led agricultural development made in the period post Russo-Japanese War.” His sharp-worded criticism raised a new topic for discussion about changes in the country’s agriculture in the early colonial period in conjunction with the controversy over whether the country really achieved modernization during that time, when it was more or less in a state of lull. His criticism points at recent remarks by Rhee Younghoon (Yi Yŏnghun).

While making a critical remark about the historical novel Arirang (1994) written by Jo Jung-rae (Cho Chŏngrae), Rhee expressed a view that the Pyŏkkolche embankment was a tidal embankment. He said that the agricultural development in the Honam Plains was made in earnest directly after the Russo-Japan War (1904-1905) through the launch of the Japanese-led tenant farms and reclamation projects, which were rapidly carried out at the same time, and that the country recorded a straight sharp growth on the back of agricultural development made in the 1910s. Then, was the Pyŏkkolche embankment really a tidal embankment and were nearby reclamation projects carried out rapidly in and around 1910, as Rhee Younghoon claimed? And did such changes end up leading the rise in the country’s agricultural productivity at that time? Answers to the questions are contained in the history of the Pyŏkkolche embankment, which was closed in the 20th century, and of the Tongjin Irrigation Association (Tongjin Suri Chohap), established in 1925 for the farms irrigated by the Pyŏkkolche embankment.

The Honam Plains are the country’s largest rice producing area, extending along Man’gyŏnggang (Man’gyeonggang) and Tongjin’gang (Dongjingang) Rivers (Fig. 1). The Tongjin Irrigation Association supplied water to the middle and lower reaches of Tongjin’gang, including the regions of Kimje (Gimje) and Chŏngūp (Jeongeup), and
launched the campaign for the establishment of irrigation associations. The establishment of Southern and Northern Tongjin Irrigation Associations were planned in 1910, and the Tongjin Irrigation Association in 1911. Their mode of operation was in a way similar to that operating along Man’gyōnggang, but they ended in failure, or at least in delay. Ultimately, the failure of the campaign for the establishment of
irrigation associations had something to do with the function of the Pyŏkkolche embankment (as a reservoir/ a tidal embankment). However, the earnest case analysis of the Tongjin Irrigation Association related to the Pyŏkkolche embankment, which is the focal point of the matter in question, has been delayed. Now, Huh’s (2011) raising of the issue and the controversy started by it prompt our demonstrative research on the Tongjin Irrigation Association. This paper attempts to shed light on several controversies reignited by Huh’s book concerning whether colonial rule really helped modernize the country’s farming, with a focus on the view that the Pyŏkkolche embankment was a tidal embankment.

**New Controversy over Korea’s Modernization during the Colonial Period**

The controversy over whether the country really accomplished modernization thanks to the colonists led to confrontation between two groups of people opposed to each other concerning the nature of Japanese colonial rule in Korea (i.e., whether the country was exploited as a colony or whether it benefited from modern development and growth). One group intends to overcome colonial brainwashing and provide support for a nationalism-based study of history focusing on the country’s inherent potential for development, while the other focuses on positive aspects of colonial period, including the economic growth of the country during the colonial period. The macroprudent discourses and the controversy over historic perspectives have led to the raising of issues concerning the living standards of Koreans during the colonial period.

The assertion that their colonial rule contributed to the modernization of colonies still remains a generally accepted idea in advanced countries with imperial pasts. Such an idea is still infused into the minds of people in third world countries that underwent colonial rule. In Japan, it is not a subject of major controversy whether its colonial rule contributed to the modernization of Chosŏn (Joseon). Japanese think that their imperialism
contributed to the development of colonies through education, medical services, mass media, and social infrastructure. Korean historians hold a critical position about such a pattern of subordinate growth. Huh Sooyoul, in particular, exposes the illusion of the development of colonies by shedding empirical light on the reality of Korean rural villages during the early colonial period.

The controversy over the modernization of Korea during the colonial period intensified even further in tandem with the country’s rigid ideological divides. The issue remains a controversial point in Korean studies amid the recent ascent of neo-liberalism (or neo-imperialism). However, the controversy has failed to yield productive discourse amidst overblown ideological concepts using sentiment-ridden expressions and exaggerations. Huh Sooyoul’s book is a study aimed at those embroiled in such controversies. The book is a revised version of the “Nongŏp kaebal” (Nongeop gaebal; Agricultural Development) section of Huh’s earlier book Kaebal ŏmnŭn kaebal [Development without development, 2005], recomposed from an empirical perspective and taking into account the recent controversy.

Huh disputes Rhee Younghoon’s view that the Pyŏkkolche embankment was a tidal embankment, and the position taken by Rhee Younghoon and Kim Naknyŏn (Kim Naknyeon) that Chosŏn’s economy developed in the 1910s. The book enumerates those factors that are usually cited as providing support for the growth of agriculture in Korea in the 1910s: 1) The economic boom in Japan following the end of World War I (Chapter 4); 2) Japanese-led rapid land reclamation in Korea (Chapters 3 and 5); 3) Changes in the system of sharing crops between landowner and tenant (Chapters 6 and 7). Above all, Huh cites the Pyŏkkolche embankment as an important landmark for the explanation of the trend to changes in agriculture in the early colonial period (Chapter 3). The factual issue of whether the Pyŏkkolche embankment was a system of reservoirs or a tidal embankment is associated with judgment beyond these simple functions on the macroprudent trend of the country’s agriculture. Preceding and following chapters are focus on the trend of agricultural productivity
preceding or following development projects initiated by the Pyŏkkolche embankment. Thus, Huh’s book checks from the perspective of agricultural history the recent controversy over support for the idea of colonialism as a means of modernization.

Recently, the colonial rule supporters published a supplementary view on the long-term estimation of the Korean economy, which reignited discussion about the trend of the country’s agriculture during the colonial period. This view (2012) relates the “straight growth trend” of the colonial period to the country’s rapid growth in the post-liberation period, and urges a drastic revision in the way we look at the economic growth (i.e., an industrial revolution) that occurred during the colonial period. However, the colonial rule supporters avoid empirical discussion about the trends in agriculture in the early colonial period, which Huh criticizes. Consequently, the controversy over the country’s modernization during the period is still going on, and the issues raised by Huh remain open to discussion. This paper intends to undertake a demonstrative review of the discussion about the initial stage of the long-term trend and about the Pyŏkkolche embankment, which is a focal point of the discussion, noting that the related controversy remains unresolved, with a view to restarting a discussion of the country’s modernization during the colonial period.

**Controversy over the View that the Pyŏkkolche Embankment was a Tidal Embankment**

Jo Jung-rae’s novel *Arirang* is set in Kimje and Kunsan (Gunsan), Chŏllabuk-to (Jeollabuk-do). As shown in Figure 1, Kimje-kun is in the center of the Honam Plains. It is a place where land reclamation was carried out rapidly, and many reclamation villages were located along the mid- and lower reaches of Tongjin’gang. First of all, in response to the view embodied in the novel that the colonists perpetrated forcible exploitation of Korean-owned land in the course of a land survey project in Kimje-kun, Rhee Younghoon criticizes this as groundless given the law
of that time.\textsuperscript{15} Rhee says that it was impossible to exploit Korean-owned fertile cropland under the law. He says that, contrary to what Jo narrates in his novel, the Kimje Plains “had many abandoned places here and there, with a dense growth of reeds. They were largely a lonely field causing a sense of dreariness at night with the howling of wolves.”

As regards the reason why the Honam Plains were “largely a lonely field … with a dense growth of reeds……causing a sense of dreariness” until the early 20th century, Rhee says that the Pyŏkkolche embankment, though it was known as a water source, was not a reservoir but a tidal embankment – according to him, a dreary-looking field spread out below the tidal embankment. There are engineering studies and archaeological reports indicating this was so.\textsuperscript{16} An MBC-made TV program criticized Rhee’s view that the Pyŏkkolche embankment was a tidal embankment, raising questions like, “[t]hen, were the Honam Plains originally barren land?” or “Does that mean that there were no rice paddies there before the colonial period?” In other words, the broadcast program takes the same side as Huh.

Rhee’s response to the program’s criticism disclosed more clearly his view that the Pyŏkkolche embankment was a tidal embankment.\textsuperscript{17} He said that tidal embankments along the west coast, including the Pyŏkkolche embankment, were repaired by Japanese landowners by 1917, at the latest, and that the repair work had something to do with the belated establishment of the Tongjin Irrigation Association. That is to say, locals needed separate large-scale reservoirs, as the Pyŏkkolche embankment was a tidal embankment, and thus it took time to establish the irrigation association. It is said that Japanese carried out land reclamations proactively in the area right after the end of the Russo-Japan War, as shown by the case of Hashimoto Farm. As it were, the earnest development of Kimje and Man’gyŏng Plains were carried out in or about 1910, mostly by Japanese in the course of the land reclamation project, and this resulted in the previously noted sharp rise in agricultural productivity in the 1911-1918 period.

The surveyed ground plan of the Pyŏkkolche embankment, Chŏllabuk-
to, appeared during the course of the establishment of the Tongjin Irrigation Association in 1913. The map, recently discovered by Huh Sooyoul, was included in the project plan drawn up while preparations were being made for the establishment of the irrigation association. It was part of a plan to repair and use the abandoned Pyŏkkolche embankment as a major water source by the Tongjin Irrigation Association (1911). This indicates that the Pyŏkkolche embankment had been a reservoir, and that a plan was being set up for the repair of the now abandoned reservoir. This was quite similar to the case of the Imik Irrigation Association (1909), established along the bank of Man’gyŏnggang, and followed land improvement (including repair of existing irrigation facilities) guidelines set by the Japanese Governor-General’s Office in Korea in the 1910s. Around that time, a large-scale plan was set up to repair the abandoned Hwangdŏngje (Hwangdeungje) embankment (renamed Yogoje after the repair) by the Imik Irrigation Association (Imik Suri Chohap). As this repair work was really carried out, the case was different from that of the Pyŏkkolche embankment, but the plan for the establishment of the Imik Irrigation Association could be made by dint of the existence of the abandoned reservoir Hwangdŏngje. The project, which was set up by Fujii Kantaro (藤井寛太郎), known as the No. 1 irrigation specialist in Chosŏn, was recorded as a prime example of failure in the modern history of irrigation associations. (The embankment was permanently abandoned in 1937; the relevant story will be continued later in this paper.) One interesting fact is that Fujii was the chief of the Imik Irrigation Association (1909) and the Igok Irrigation Association (Igok Suri Chohap, 1920), and he was one of the key actors engaged in promoting the plan to establish the North Tongjin Irrigation Association (Tongjin Pukpu Suri Chohap, 1910), the Tongjin’gang Irrigation Association (Tongjin’gang Suri Chohap, 1911), and the Tongjin Irrigation Association (1925). He already had experience of repairing existing embankments.
Comparison with the Northern Region of Man’gyŏnggang River: A New Case

The Tongjin Irrigation Association, which was established for the areas irrigated from the Pyŏkkolche embankment, was typical of the modern irrigation associations set up during the Increased Rice Production Program Period (1920-1934). A leading symbol of colonial projects, it was a super-sized (larger than 10,000 ha) reservoir-based irrigation association, and Japanese assumed the roles of key actors for its establishment and promotion.20 (The manager of the Iri Branch of Doyo Takushoku acted as the Chairman of the Establishment Committee, and the Chŏllabuk-to Governor served as its first chief.) The association, which was established in 1925, closed the Pyŏkkolche embankment, but used it as the bank for principal water conduits, and built a large-scale reservoir (Unam Reservoir) on the upper reaches of the river. The Tongjin Irrigation Association, which supplied water to the areas along Tongjin’gang River, contrasted with small-sized irrigation associations along Man’gyŏnggang River that had run repaired irrigation facilities in the 1910s.21

The Tongjin Irrigation Association was not able to use the Pyŏkkolche embankment as a reservoir anew. It had set up a plan only to use it in the initial stage, as Huh Sooyoul pointed out based on the evidence of the Pyŏkkolche embankment ground plan map. In contrast, the West Okku Irrigation Association (Okku Sŏbu Suri Chohap, 1908), which was the country’s first modern irrigation association, used previously built weirs, such as Mije and Sŏnje (Seonje), as new water sources on the northern bank of Man’gyŏnggang River. In a nearby area, a modern Chŏnik Irrigation Association (Chŏnik Suri Chohap, 1910) was established, after repairs to a previously built weir named Tokchuhangbo (Dokjuhangbo; a.k.a., Samnyech’ŏnbang. It is a traditional large-scale canal).22 It was as a part of the series of steps taken this way that Hwangdŭngje, which was one of the three leading weirs in Honam, along with the Pyŏkkolche embankment, was developed as a new water source for the aforesaid Imik
Irrigation Association (1909). In this way, many previously built irrigation facilities, particularly weirs, were used anew as reservoirs in the early years of the history of irrigation associations in Chŏllabuk-to. This was possible because the previously built embanked structures were reservoirs.

Rhee Younghoon highlighted brisk Japanese reclamation projects around the time of its forcible annexation of Korea in 1910, and pointed to a case of construction of a tidal embankment by the Imok Irrigation Association (Imok Suri Chohap, 1911) along the lower reaches of Man’gyŏnggang River. According to Chŏnbuk nongjo ch’ilshimnyŏn sa [The 70-year History of the Chŏnbuk Farmland Improvement Association], there were cases of repairs to tidal embankments and construction of tide gates in the areas controlled by the nearly South Imik Irrigation Association (Imik Nambu Suri Chohap, 1909).23 These accounts indicate that land reclamation projects were carried out by irrigation associations in the lower reaches of Man’gyŏnggang River around that time, as in the case of the Hashimoto Farm. However, not a single case of an irrigation association engaged in the redevelopment of previously built tidal embankments as reservoirs in Chŏllabuk-to has been reported in the early modern period, as Rhee Younghoon claimed (i.e., that the Pyŏkkolche embankment was a tidal embankment).

At the time of the establishment of the irrigation association, Hwangdŭngje, an abandoned embankment, could not function as an irrigation facility, unlike Mije or Sŏnje, controlled by the West Okku Irrigation Association, or Tokchuhangbo, controlled by the Chŏnik Irrigation Association. In this respect, it was similar to the Pyŏkkolche embankment. Fujii Kantaro, the Chief of the Imik Irrigation Association, repaired Hwangdŭngje as if it was a new construction project. Work started in February 1910 and was completed in May 1911, when it was renamed Yogyoje (Fig. 2).24 It is a well-known fact that local farmers staged a fierce campaign against the establishment of the irrigation association at that time due to the high burden of association fees to be shouldered by them.25 Despite the work, there was no improvement in the
situation associated with the shortage of water for farming and flood. In 1933, the irrigation association started work on building Kyŏngch’ŏn (Gyeongcheon) Reservoir as an alternative water source in the upper reaches of the Kosanch’ŏn (Gosancheon) Stream (completed in December 1937) and closed Yogyoje, on which a huge amount had been spent over 20-plus years. The cases of failure points to technological limitations associated with flat land-type (especially, low bottom-type) weirs (i.e., a small storage capacity). After all, from a comparative historical perspective, the plan to use the Pyŏkkolche embankment anew as a water source was abandoned in the initial stage in the early 1910s due to the technological limitations associated with Hwangdŭngje (or Yogyoje). A similar case is found in Nulche (Nulje), one of the three leading weirs in Honam, along with the Pyŏkkolche embankment.
Nulche, in Kobu (Gobu), now Chŏngŭp (Jeongeup), experienced a fate similar to that of the Pyŏkkolche embankment. Nulche, which was one of the largest reservoirs in Kobu-hyŏn during the Chosŏn Period, was closed for the second time in 1873, the 10th year of the reign of King Kojong (Gojong). (It is said that it was closed for the first time during the mid-16th Century). It lost its original function by 1916, when the Kobu Irrigation Association (Kobu Suri Chohap) was established. In 1916, the irrigation association gave up a plan to use Nulche anew as a reservoir. It built a new one and named it Hŭngdŏkche (Heungdeokje) about 4 km upstream. Eventually, Nulche met a fate very similar to that of the Pyŏkkolche embankment as a perpetually abandoned reservoir during the colonial period. In 1941, the Kobu Irrigation Association was merged with the nearby Tongjin Irrigation Association.

As reviewed above, irrigation facilities (mostly weirs) came to be repaired and used as water sources (i.e., reservoirs) for modern irrigation associations during the Chosŏn Period and thereafter in the 20th Century, or else they were permanently abandoned like the Pyŏkkolche embankment or Nulche. Some previously built reservoirs like Hwangdŭngje went through a transitional course of being included in a plan for re-use as a new reservoir and then abandoned. Such a transition course is displayed in the previous history of the Pyŏkkolche embankment. The Pyŏkkolche embankment ground plan map of 1913, recently discovered by Huh Sooyoul, reflects the situation in which plans were set up to use previously built weirs, including Hwangdŭngje, as new water sources. Judging from a hydraulic perspective, it is hard to understand such a plan for the construction of a new reservoir if the Pyŏkkolche embankment was not a previously built reservoir. Reversely, it tells us that not a single case of turning a tidal embankment into a reservoir can be found in the Honam Plains. Rather, would it not be more logical to think that the Pyŏkkolche embankment was used anew as a previously built reservoir to push ahead with the land reclamation projects carried out in the areas, as Rhee Younghoon said? That is because land reclamation projects must have needed a large water resource such as a reservoir.
Agricultural Productivity Before and After Irrigation Projects: Verification of Hypotheses

The assertion made by Rhee Younghoon and Kim Naknyeon that the country’s agricultural production in the 1911-1918 period was higher than in the 1919-1929 period thanks to Japanese landowners’ proactive land reclamation projects is a major point of interest when it comes to the evaluation of the projects in studies of irrigation associations. Kim Naknyeon’s “supplementary version” (2012) cited in footnote twelve, extended the long-term trend of the country’s economy to the post-liberation period, but it fails to explain “the sharp rise in agricultural productivity in the early colonial period,” which is the focus of the issue in question. Moreover, no productive counterargument has been made concerning Huh Sooyoul’s demonstrative criticism. Thus, one is under the impression that the controversy over the country’s modernization during the colonial period still remains in “a league of its own” in terms of ideological topography, primarily because of insufficient empirical studies on land reform projects (mostly irrigation association projects) of that time and on the Increased Rice Production Program (1920-34) associated with them.

According to Choson ip’og saöp yoram [Chosŏn land improvement projects outline], the number of irrigation associations established in the 1910s stood at an extremely low level. (The number increased in the 1920s.) At that time, the focus was put on the repair of existing irrigation facilities rather than on the development of new water sources or the establishment of irrigation associations. As discussed in detail in Chapter 5 of Huh Sooyoul’s book, “T’oji kaeryang” (Land Improvement), land reclamation projects were carried out by only a few irrigation associations. The focus of land improvement projects was on work relating to irrigation and drainage facilities. Besides, it is even meaningless to try to compare land reclamation activities carried out by individual Japanese landowners in or around 1910 to land improvement projects carried out by irrigation associations with policy-based support.
from General Government of Korea (hereafter, GGK) in the 1920s.

In the 1910s, Japanese landowner-led agricultural cultivation in the Honam Plains was carried out more actively on the northern bank of Man’gyŏnggang River (so-called “irrigation associations districts”) rather than on the estuary of the Tongjin [Dongjin] River. At that time, a large number of Japanese stably took part in land improvement projects through irrigation associations, although some of them engaged in land reclamation activities through individual irrigation. However, not all of the irrigation association-led projects progressed without problems. The West Okku Irrigation Association (1908) and the Chŏnik Irrigation Association (1910) conducted a stable operation, using existing irrigation facilities on the northern estuary of Man’gyŏnggang River, but the Imik Irrigation Association (1909), the South Imik Irrigation Association (1909), and the Imok Irrigation Association (1911) recorded poor financial performance under the burden of new large-scale projects. In general, among the five irrigation associations that were established around 1910, only the West Okku and Chŏnik appear to have been in healthy financial shape. That is, the two recorded an increase in agricultural productivity (a basis for stable high yield) following their establishment. However, it does not mean that the others established around that time recorded similar results. In the 1910s, only a small portion of rice paddies enjoyed the benefit of irrigation and thus well-performing irrigation associations could not exert meaningful influence in producing an increase in farmland productivity on the national level.34

As noted in the foregoing, the attempt made by the Imik Irrigation Association (1909) for development of Hwangdŭngje (Yogyoje) is referred to as a prime example of a failed project in the early modern history of irrigation associations. Large Japanese land owners, including Fujii Kantaro (later, Fuji Kogyo—不二興業), suffered business failures due to reckless schemes like this. Fujii also took part in a campaign for the establishment of the Tongjin River Irrigation Association. He was a typical example of a landowner who improved unreclaimed land (Fujii-type). Standing at the opposite end of the spectrum was Toyo Takushoku,
a typical example of a landowner who utilized previously cultivated land (Toyo-type). Rhee Younghoon’s asserts, as noted in the case of the Hashimoto Farm, that there was a category of “unreclaimed land-improving” landowners like those Japanese who took part in reclamation projects in the area around 1910; he says that they were the mainstream type of Japanese landowners. However, the “unreclaimed land-improving type of landowners” can hardly be designated as the mainstream of so-called “dynamically active” landowners due to limitations of equity capital and risk of agricultural investment. If they had been the mainstream, the area of the land improved through individual irrigation in the 1910s would have been greater than that in the 1920s. However, they pursued stable management that distributed risk through irrigation associations.

With regard to Japanese landowners’ management behavior, Huh Sooyoul holds a basic position that provides support to Yi Kyusu’s [Lee Gyusu] view that they preferred previously cultivated land. Their view was that in the 1910s land reclamation by individuals, not relying on irrigation associations, was not a mainstream business type among Japanese landowners. Rather, the well-known cases of Kumamoto Farm or Hosokawa Farm fall under the category of a typical Japanese management style of utilizing previously cultivated land, as Toyo did. They preferred participation in stable operation of irrigation associations to individual irrigation. In contrast, the case of Hashimoto Farm, along with Fujii Farm, is thought to fall under the category of the “unreclaimed land-improving” type of landowner. However, earnest cultivation of unreclaimed (i.e., waste) land had to be backed by systematic policy-based support from GGK. Concerning Japanese landowners’ management behavior around 1910, controversial points still exist over their land ownership patterns. In consideration of this situation of the history of research, Huh Sooyoul’s assertion that Japanese landowners preferred previously cultivated land raises a major point of controversy relating to the landowners’ management behavior in the early colonial period and the timing of agricultural development.
According to Namgoong Bong [Namgung Pong], systematic land reclamation along Man’gyŏnggang River and middle and lower reaches of Tongjin’gang River was started in earnest along with the Six-Year Chosŏn Streams Repair Plan (1924-1929). It is not simple coincidence that the formation of the reclamation villages in the area was concentrated around that period. It cannot be said that completely new villages came to be formed as a result of the project. Hamlets had existed everywhere in the past. It was not difficult to find subsistence farmers relying on “speculative” farming, withstanding natural disasters along the lower reaches of large streams. Prior to the repair of Man’gyŏnggang, there were expansive rice paddies that could be purchased at very low prices along the coast on the Honam Plains, but they were risky investment destinations for large-scale cultivation activities. The area boasted relatively higher land productivity than Kyŏngsang-to (Gyeongsang-do) or Kyŏnggi-to (Gyeonggi-do) areas, but we need to keep in mind that crop productivity displayed great variation between regions due to natural and geographical conditions, e.g., shortage of irrigation water or drought.

Conclusion: Issues Raised by the New Controversy

Huh Sooyoul’s book includes a historical study about the campaign for the establishment of the Tongjin Irrigation Association in the initial period in conjunction with his review of the recent controversy over whether the Pyŏkkolche embankment was a tidal embankment. The book has significance in terms of the history of research, as it leads the controversy over the country’s modernization during the colonial period in a more productive direction, when it could easily end up as a merely sterile discussion. The paper also aims to draw demonstrative attention to land improvement projects carried out on the Honam Plains around 1910 through a critical examination of the view that the Pyŏkkolche embankment was a tidal embankment. This paper supports Huh Sooyoul’s position that we can hardly accept Rhee Younghoon’s view of
the Pyŏkkolche embankment as a tidal embankment, by citing the setting up of irrigation associations, including Hwangdŭngje, comparable to the Pyŏkkolche embankment, in the northern estuary of Man’gyŏnggang River at an early stage. New cases such as these were in step with the direction of the agricultural policy of GGK in the 1910s, which was focused on the repair of existing irrigation facilities, as Huh Sooyoul demonstrated in the Pyŏkkolche embankment ground plan map. They also display a tendency similar to the existing tendency of modest productivity from a macroprodudent perspective. This paper intends to conclude as follows by summarizing several controversial points partly stated above.

The Pyŏkkolche embankment is typical of a weir built on flat land developed on the plains of Chŏlla-to and it shows a contrast with weirs built in valleys in the Kyŏngsang-to area. The latter were built on the upper reaches of large-sized streams or in basins along the tributaries, while the former were mostly built along the middle and lower reaches of large streams.40 Judging from such a basic fact, it can be easily inferred that, just because the Pyŏkkolche embankment was located in a place about 6-7 km away from the west coast, it is not correct to say that it was not a previously built reservoir.41 There were many flat land reservoirs in rice-producing areas in the plains of Chŏlla-to close to the coast, including the aforementioned Hwangdŭngje, Nulche, and Okku reservoirs, to name a few. Unlike reservoirs in valleys, those in flat land were flat-bottomed and could only accommodate a relatively small amount of water. Huh Sooyoul points out that the plan to use the Pyŏkkolche embankment anew as a reservoir was stopped in the early 1910s, just because of such a problem, and that the Tongjin Irrigation Association could not have been established earlier, unlike the small irrigation associations established along the northern estuary of Man’gyŏnggang River. Such a technical difficulty was solved only during the Increased Rice Production Program Period in the 1920s. The Tongjin Irrigation Association got over the problem by building a new large-scale reservoir at the upper reaches of the stream after having given up the plan to use the Pyŏkkolche embankment anew as a reservoir. A technical problem like this that
requires modern hydraulic/civil engineering knowledge is an important subject that should be examined deeply in future case studies. Through such an effort, we will be able to see the real substance of the Pyŏkkolche embankment and restore its final shape completely.

As for “largely a lonely field with a dense growth of reeds and rice paddies close to the coast” on the Honam Plains, this description was partly correct prior to the Increased Rice Production Program Period in the 1920s. The area sometimes suffered from disasters caused by tide and tsunami accompanied by salt water and wind. Droughts that caused shortage of irrigation water continued to harass locals. It was the irony of history that the Tongjin Irrigation Association was established later than the associations on the northern estuary of Man’gyŏnggang River despite a need to cope with such a situation. Considering the desperate need for irrigation, the Tongjin Irrigation Association should have been established earlier. Its late establishment (in 1925) indicates that there were technological limitations and difficulties in coordination of opinions. It also implies the existence of a long-kept irrigation order in rural areas along the Tongjin’gang River that even large Japanese landowners or colonists could not change drastically. It does not make sense that the irrigation order was established in what was “largely a lonely field or rice paddies close to the coast.” Huh Sooyoul’s criticism indicates that the Honam Plains at the estuary of the Tongjin River were previously cultivated land where crops were grown and that an inherent irrigation order was operating, which caused difficulty in the coordination of opinions. Some large-sized Japanese landowners were carrying out land reclamation individually for such a reason up to the establishment of the Tongjin Irrigation Association in 1925, as Rhee Younghoon pointed out. However, there was a limit to what even large-scale Japanese landowners could do, physically or financially, for what appeared to be speculative land improvement for their individual economic gains. If a program had been carried out on a small scale as in the case of Hashimoto, its effect could have only been limited in terms of economy of scope. It will make sense as Huh Sooyoul said to think that it was not until the 1920s that
large-scale land improvement projects (including reclamation) were commenced in earnest on the back of policy-based support.

The view that the Pyŏkkolche embankment was a tidal embankment also indicates low land productivity of the area before the 1920s, contrary to what Rhee Younghoon suggested. In “largely a lonely field with a dense growth of reeds and rice paddies close to the coast,” or land being newly reclaimed, land productivity could not help but be relatively low. Here, the view that land which had remained uncultivated for long became cropland through reclamation is hard to accept. The area was previously cultivated land, where the three leading reservoirs in Honam were repaired or abandoned continuously during the Chosŏn Period. Some Japanese landowners had started farmland cultivation since the end of the Russo-Japan War until the 1910s, but the “unreclaimed land-improving” type of landowner were not the mainstream at that time. Moreover, it is hard to deny that their activities as individuals were put behind policy-based projects carried out under the Increased Rice Production Program in the 1920s. Rather, it is necessary to note that Japanese landowners took part in irrigation association projects proactively with the support from GGK. They were looking for methods of more stable agricultural investment. It appears that the process of establishment of the irrigation associations were faced with complicated and self-conflicting problems beyond our imagination concerning interest and risk associated with farmland cultivation in addition to a need to coordinate the aforesaid interests of landowners. In this context, Huh Sooyoul’s criticism of the view that the Pyŏkkolche embankment was a tidal embankment makes it necessary to undertake a meticulous case analysis of the key actors in the establishment of irrigation associations (1925) and their patterns of activity.

In the 1920s, Japanese landowners’ agricultural investment became brisker on the back of policy-based support, in contrast to the preceding period. So-called hard-working/sufficient fertilizer-based farming methods were also adopted in addition to wide-area land improvement projects. However, this comparison between periods applies only to the
1910s and the 1920s (i.e., the first half of the colonial period). If the entire colonial period up to 1945 is considered, it should be noted that even the 1920s was a relatively lull period in agricultural productivity. Basically, this is due to the long-term characteristics of land improvement investment. The project results in the 1920s were relatively higher than that in the 1910s, but results really need to be displayed on a long-term basis (i.e., the 1930s and the 1940s) due to the nature of the project. 1) Land improvement investment was what was pointed out in Huh Sooyoul’s book, Chapter 6 (Improved Farming Methods), but proper high productivity results can be obtained when combined with the results of 2) investment for improved farming, 3) repair of the stream, 4) farmland readjustment projects, in addition to the relevant market conditions (including a stable rice price). Generally, long-term investment such as for land improvement had special attributes and limitations as social overhead capital whose results are not going to be obtained in the near term. It should be noted that the Tongjin Irrigation Association was developed as an irrigation association aimed at multiple purposes, including projects for improvement of farming methods. The irrigation association project was formulated and executed as a large-scale industrial policy of GGK as part of the Increased Rice Production Program, but it is thought that the project was being converted into a kind of comprehensive social overhead capital during the process.

Notes:

1 Huh Sooyoul, Ilche ch’ogi Chosŏn ūi nongŏp [Agriculture of Chosŏn during the Early Days of Japanese Colonial Period] (Seoul: Han’gilsa, 2011).
2 Huh Sooyoul’s criticism is targeted at Kim Naknyeon (Kim Naknyŏn) and Rhee Younghoon (Yi Yonghun). Kim Naknyeon, Han’guk ūi kyŏngje sŏngjang 1910-1945 [Korea’s Economic Growth 1910-1945] (Seoul: Sŏul Taehakkyo Ch’ulp’anbu, 2006); Mizoguchi Toshiyuki, Kyu Nihon shokuminchi keizai

3 Huh, 19.
4 Ibid., 29.
5 Rhee Younghoon, “Uri sidae ŭi chinbojŏk chisigin – Cho Chungnae ron, kwanggi ŏrin chŭngo ŭi yŏksa sosŏl ka Cho Chungnae” [Progressive Intellectuals of Our Era – On Cho Chungnae, A History-based Novelists with Hatred Bordering on Insanity], Sidae chŏngshin (Summer 2007); Rhee Younghoon, “Kimje yŏksa ŭi pollyu e chiniphazi mot hago ibangin ŭro maemdon Cho Chungnae wa muŏt ŭl algo morŭnŭnji kubyŏl choch’a mot hanŭn MBC – Cho Chungnae wa MBC ŭi panbak e taehan chaebanbak” [Cho Chungnae, who has remained an outsider without joining the mainstream of the history of Kimje, and MBC, which is incapable of telling what it knows from what it does not – Counter-refutation about Refutation made by Cho Chungnae and MBC], Siidae chŏngsin (Fall 2007).


7 See recent book reviews in regard of this theme. Matsumoto Takenori, “Singminji kundaehwa ron’ nonjaeng ŭl numugagi wihan kuijunghan kŏlŭm : Ilje ch’ogi a Chosŏn ŭi nonggŏp e taehan supyŏng” [An indispensable step for sublating the “colonial modernization dispute”: a review of Professor Huh's recent works], Naeil ǎlyŏn ǎln ǎn yŏksa 48 (2012).

8 The following theses were introduced concerning the controversy started in 1997. Ahn Byung-jik (An Pyŏngjik), “Han’guk kunhyŏndaesa yŏn’gu ŭi saeroun p’aradaim” [A New Paradigm for Research on the Modern History of Korea: With a Focus on Economy], Ch’angjak kwa pip’yŏng 98 (Winter 1997); Shin Yongha (Sin Yongha), “Singminji kundaehwaron chaejŏngnip sido e taehan pip’an” [Criticism on an Attempt for Reestablishment of Support for Colonialism as a Means of Modernization] Ch’angjak kwa pip’yŏng 98 (Winter 1997); Jung Taehern (Chŏng T’aehŏn), “Sut’allon ŭi songnyuhwa sok e sarajin singminji” [Discourse of Colonialism Lost in the Vulgarization of the Exploitation Theory], Ch’angjak kwa pip’yŏng 97 (1997); Chong Byung-uk
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12 Huh,198-199.

13 Kim Naknyeon, Han’guk ŭi changgi tonggye. 1911-2010 [Long-term Statistics Concerning Korea, 1911-2010] (Seoul: Sŏul Taehakkyo Ch’ulp’anbu, 2012. This is a supplementary version of the following book: Kim Naknyeon. Han’guk ŭi kyŏngje sŏnjang. 1910-1945 [Economic Growth of Korea, 1910-1945] (Seoul: Sŏul Taehakkyo Ch’ulp’anbu, 2006). The supplementary version focuses on extension of economic statistics from the colonial period to
modern times.


16 Lee Changu, “Pyŏkkolche ŭi sugonghakhchŏk koch’al” [A Study of Pyŏkkolche Embankment from a Hydraulic Engineering Perspective], in *Han’guk sujawŏn hakhoe nonmunjip* [A Collection of Theses Published by the Korea Water Resources Association] (Seoul: Korea Water Resources Association, 1998), 31-4; Park Sanghyŏn et al., “Pyŏkkolche ûi pangoje kanŭngsŏng e kwanhan yŏn’gu” [A Study of the Possibility that Pyŏkkolche Embankment were a Tidal Embankment], *Han’guk kwan’gae p’aesu* 10-1 (2003); Kim Hwanki, “Kimje Pyŏkkolche ûi t’omok konghakhchŏk koch’al” [A Study of Pyŏkkolche Embankment from a Civil Engineering Perspective], Chayŏn kwa mummyŏng ŭii chohwa 56-12 (2008); Oyamada Koichi (小山田幸一), “Paekche ŭi t’omok kisul” [The Civil Engineering Technology of Paekche], *Kodae Tongashia wa Paekche* (Taejon: Ch’ungnam Taehakkyo Paekche Yŏn’guso, 2002); Mori Koichi (森浩一), “Mizo, seki, mizumi no gijutsu” [Culvert, Embankment, and Lake-related Technology], *Kodai Nihon no gijutsu to chie* (Osaka: Shoseki, 2003).

17 Rhee Young-hoon,”Kimje yŏksa ûi pollyu e chiniphaji mot hago ibangin ŭro maemdon Cho Chungnae wa muŏt ûl algo morŭnŭnji kubyŏl choch’a mot hanŭn MBC – Cho Chungnae wa MBC ûi panbak e taehan chaebanbak” [Cho Chungnae, who has remained an outsider without joining the mainstream of the history of Kimje, and MBC, which is incapable of telling what it knows from what it does not – Counter-refutation about Refutation made by Cho Chungnae and MBC], *Siidae chŏngsin* (Fall 2007). (Fall 2007).
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18 Huh, 60, 145. The map is contained in the document entitled Suri chohap sŏllip e kwahanshosabang uikon [The Matter Concerning the Survey Relating to the Establishment of the Tongjin Irrigation Association] made in 1913. It is currently kept by the National Archives of Korea. The document includes some important documents that show how the Tongjin Irrigation Association was established. Tongjin’gang Suri Chohap saŏp chosa pogosŏ (A Report on the Survey Concerning the Tongjin Irrigation Association Project); Pyŏkkolche chŏsuji kyehoeck (A Plan Concerning Pyŏkkolche Reservoir).


22 Okku Sŏbu Sori Chohap, ed., Okku Sŏbu Suri Chohap kwanggye sóryu [Documents Related to the West Okku Irrigation Association] (1908-1917); Chŏnik Suri Chohap, Chŏnik Suri Chohap chungyo sóryuch’ŏl [Important Documents Related to the Chŏnik Irrigation Association] (1909-1941).

23 Chŏnbuk Nongji Kaeryang Chohap, ed., Chŏnbuk nongjo ch’ilshimnyŏn sa
[The 70-year History of the Chŏnbuk Farmland Improvement Association], (1978), 149.
32 Thus, the latter two were merged by the Igok Irrigation Association under the leadership of Fujii Kantaro in 1920. Igok Suri Chohap, ed., *Igok Suri Chohap
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33 U Taehyŏng. “Ilcheha Man’gyŏnggang yuyŏk suri chohap yŏn’gu” [A Study of Irrigation Associations along the Estuary of Man’gyŏnggang River during the Colonial Period], Tongbang Hakchi 131 (2005); Chung Seungjin, (2009a, 2009b).

34 The size of irrigated rice paddies were as follows: the West Okku Irrigation Association, 490 ha; the Chŏnik Irrigation Association, 1,445 ha; the Imik Irrigation Association, 3,343 ha in 1927; the South Imik Irrigation Association, 2,792 ha; the Imok Irrigation Association, 2,780 ha in 1915. Chosŏn Chongdokbu Toji Kaeryangbu, ed., Chosŏn t’oji kaeryang saŏp yoram [Chosŏn Land Improvement Projects Outline] (1927).

35 Concerning “unreclaimed land-improving” type and “reclaimed land-utilizing” type of landowners of the colonial period, read Yi Kyusu, Kindai Chosen niokeru shokuminchi jinushi seito nomin undo [The Landownership System during the Colonial Period and Farmers’ Movement], 1996. He expresses an interesting view that agricultural associations in Kunsan were composed of members with different characteristics, i.e. unreclaimed land-improving” type (Fuji type) and “reclaimed land-utilizing” type (Toyo type) of landowners. It results in the collision of opinions among the members over landownership (management).


37 So Sünyŏl, Shokuminchi koki Chosen jinushisei no kenkyu – Chŏllabuk-to o chushinni [A Study of the Landowner System of Chosŏn in the Later Colonial Period – With a Focus on Chŏllabuk-to] (Ph.D. Diss., Kyoto University, 1994); Chung Seungjin and Matsumoto Takenori, “Yŏngju esŏ singminji taejjju ro: Ilbon kwijok Hosokawa kaŭi Han’guk esŏ ūi t’oji chipchŏk” [From a Feudal Lord to a Large-Sized Landowner in a Colony: Accumulation of

38 Namgoong Bong, 66-69. He divides reclamation villages in the area into the following: 1) traditional (small-scale) bank system (including complex canals), reclamation method based on Bochangbaemi, 2) a river estuary reclamation type, and 3) a seashore reclamation type. The reclaimed land and villages in question along Man’gyönggang and the mid- and lower reaches of the Tongjin River belong to type two. They were cultivated in the 1920s by Japanese landowners.

39 Pyŏn Chusŭng, *Chosŏn hugi yumin yŏn’gu [A Study of Wandering People in the Late Chosŏn Period]* (Ph.D. Diss., Korea University, 1997).

40 Yi Kwangnin, 1961; Miyajima Hiroshi, 1983.

41 Rhee Younghoon said that Pyŏkkolche embankment was a previously built tide embankment based on the said fact. Rhee, 2007.


43 Matsumoto Takenori, 1991; Hong Sŏngch’an, *Ilcheha Man’gyönggang yuyŏk ūi sahosa: suri chohap, chijuje, chiyŏk chŏngch’i [The History of Society along Man’gyönggang River during the Colonial Period: Irrigation Associations, the Landowners System, Local Politics]* (Seoul: Hyean, 2006).

44 U Taehyŏng, “1920-nyŏndaе Han’guk migok saengsansŏng ūi chŏngch’e” [Lull in Rice Production in Korea during the 1920s], *Kyŏngje sahak* 25 (1998).