

GI-WOOK SHIN / MICHAEL ROBINSON (eds), *Colonial Modernity in Korea*. (Harvard East Asian Monographs, 184) Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 1999. XIII, 466 pages, 2 maps, 15 tables, £ 35.95. ISBN 0-674-14255-1

*Colonial Modernity in Korea* is a collection of twelve papers with an introduction to the complexities of Korean "colonial modernity" by the editors Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson and an epilogue by Carter J. Eckert.

In the first part, "Colonial Modernity and Hegemony", Chulwoo Lee probes the relation between legislation and legal rights in the early colonial years with concepts drawn from Michel Foucault. Michael Robinson offers a synopsis of the effects of the radio on Korean identity, and a brief review of the impact of pop music. In their contribution Gi-Wook Shin and Do-Hyun Han interpret the Rural Revitalization Campaign from a corporatist perspective. Michael Schneider analyzes internationalism and identity in the Rice Production Promotion Campaign, outlining the opposition of a Japanese colonial scholar, Tadao Yanaihara. Daqing Yang limits his contribution mainly to a case study of the development of a telecommunications network, opening a new area in colonial studies, and Soon-Won Park extends her own recent volume on the subject by providing a substantive overview of scholarship on colonial labor.

The second part, "Colonial Modernity and Identity", deals with such subjects as the women's movement, colonial literature, and nationalist historiography. Kenneth Wells examines the position of women in colonial Korea, Kyeong-Hee Choi provides a substantial study of gender, colonialism, and modernity. She analyzes a novel by Pak Wansô and underscores the paradoxes faced by women in the colonial era. Michael Shin examines the best-known work of the "father" of modern Korean literature, Yi Kwangsu. Clark Sorensen demonstrates how the term *nongmin* as a definition of class became increasingly identified with Korean ethnicity during the colonial period. Jeong-Seop Kim examines "the double-edged nature of colonial modernity, its enabling and restraining effects" in relation to the group of hereditary social outcasts known as the *paekchông*. Henry Em examines the term *minjok* in the historiography of Shin Ch'aeho.

As the editors note, core historical, social and cultural knowledge of Korea in the West still lags considerably behind research on Japan or China. With its diversity of subjects *Colonial Modernity in Korea* thus provides stimulating reading for those in the West interested in Korea's colonial history. This book is a successful collective effort that helps broaden and diversify research in English on the Korean colonial period.

The stated aim of this volume is to move beyond nationalist interpretations and their dichotomies of Asia and the West, Japan and Korea, rich but tainted collaborators versus pure, impoverished masses. According to the editors, the new historiography should focus on the complex relations among colonialism, modernity, nationalism and identity formation, and specify complex and over-

lapping relations among multiple layers of colonialism, competing versions of nationalism, and alternative narratives of political community.

Such an ambitious, indeed courageous undertaking aimed at reorienting historiography on colonial Korea sometimes causes problems, particularly when the authors touch questions which are still discussed controversially. Soon-Won Park, for example, speaks of "the liberation from the politically oriented conventional periodization" of 1930–1945, 1945–1960, 1960 and after, and wants to focus on a longer period, 1930–1960, as a fundamental transition period for twentieth-century Korean society and its economy (p. 159) – yet without offering convincing reasons for the adoption of such a long period, and in fact "neutralizing" the colonial period.

Chulwoo Lee writes that the Land and Building Certification Regulations of 1906 issued by the Japanese Residency-General "were designed to promote the commodification of land by enabling those who obtained certifications of their real property transactions to enforce the agreement directly" (p. 25). What he does not mention is how these regulations caused turmoil in traditional Korean property regimes and how important they were in transferring land to Japanese private citizens and the state.

Michael Schneider's essay as such is quite interesting, yet at times he might have written with more caution. For example, he argues (p. 104) that the so-called Cultural Rule in the 1920s "was designed to increase agricultural productivity and rural income in Korea". This can hardly be considered a convincing description of that period of colonial rule.

Programmatically, Carter J. Eckert takes a clear-cut position on such methodological issues. He emphasizes that all good historical writing "must be constructed on the basis of a fair assessment of all the available evidence, including evidence that may be subversive of the thesis or that suggests the possibility of other interpretations" (p. 376).

If one desires to write "postnationalist historiography", there is no need to ignore the structures of dependency and exploitation of colonialism. The colonial past is still a sensitive subject in Korea as well as in Japan. Particularly in Japan some statements in this book might well be instrumentalized by right-wing extremists. Would that be in the interest of the authors?

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