

## 한 한국인 역사가와 한 국학의 외연

### What Koreanology means to a Korea-based historian

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생각하는 경향이 있었다. 그들의 입장에서는 조선의 건국 주체로 신진사대부의 질적 차이를 강조하는 한국학계의 시도는 다소 과장된 것으로 보였을지도 모른다. 그러나 아이러니하게도 근대를 가상의 종착점으로 하여 한국의 전근대사를 서술하려 하거나 발전단계를 설정하려 했다는 점에서, 조선시대 사람들의 눈높이와 당대적 맥락을 상대적으로 중시하지 않았다는 점에서 그들 모두는 크게 다르지 않았다.

유형원의 반계수록도 좋은 예시가 될 수 있다. 한국의 역사학자들은 이 책에서 사회문제 해결을 위한 실학의 개혁안을 보았지만, 서구의 역사가들은 이 책에서 조선의 근대성 내지 근대지향성을 읽어내려는 시도에 회의적이었다. 역사에 대한 다양한 견해와 시야는 소중한 것이라고 해야 하겠지만, 21세기의 연구지형에서 지금 되돌아켜보면 이렇게 묻지 않을 수 없다. “과연 질문은 충분했는가?” 필자는 이렇게 묻고 싶다. “반계수록이라면, 유형원 자신의 문제의식과 눈높이에서 문제를 보아야 하는 것이 아닌가? 유형원이 만들려 했던 나라는 어떤 것이었는가? 그것은 중화라는 이름으로 그들이 설정하려 한 보편가치와 어떤 관계를 맺고 있었는가?”

발표자는 ‘질문의 빈곤’을 넘어서 어떻게 조선시대 사람들의 눈높이에서 그들의 세계관과 학문관을 이해하는 것이 무엇보다 중요하다고 생각한다. 최남선과 신채호 같은 한국인들이 조선을 설명하는 틀도, 서구 학자들이 반계수록을 설명하는 틀도 거리를 두고 들여다보아야 하는 이유다. 맥락을 존중하여 그 시대와 사람들을 잘 그려 내는 것이 중요하기 때문이다. 역사학이 인문학의 일부인 한 인간과 시대에 대한 통찰력을 길러가는 그 길에서 이탈해서는 안 된다.

남은 질문이 있다. 그렇게 하는 것으로 우리가 한국의 역사와 문화를 통해 세계시민에 기여하는 길

한국의 역사학의 역사는 선구적 역사학자이며 언론인 그리고 독립운동가인 신채호로부터 시작한다고 해도 과언은 아니다. 그는 단군이 모든 한국인의 조상이었다고 주장했다. 그는 또 한국이 고대에 넓은 영역과 강력한 왕국의 자랑스러운 역사를 가지고 있다고 믿어 의심치 않았다. 그에게 있어 역사란 학술적 담론이면서 동시에 독립운동의 한 도구였다.

한국의 전근대사를 두고, 해방 후 한국 학자들은 극적인 전환과 현저한 발전의 양상을 드러내는 데 집중해 왔다. 그러나 서구의 한국사 연구자들은 안정성과 장기지속성을 한국사를 중국사나 일본사와 구별하게 하는 특성으로

을 찾을 수 있을까? 만일 그것이 가능하다면, 어디에서 시작해야 할까? 발표자는 시대착오, 목적론, 이분법을 넘어 인간의 삶과 현실이 그려내는 중층성과 복합성을 읽어내는 것에서 시작할 수 있다고 생각한다. 그렇게 함으로써 우리는 우리 자신이 누구인지를 더 잘 알 수 있다. 우리를 둘러싼 선입견과 편견을 넘어설 수 있으며, 세계시민의 일원이 되어 세계시민에게 기여할 수 있을 것이다.

## Abstract

When it comes to browsing the history of the modern historiography of Korea, we need to start with Shin Chaeho, a leading historian, journalist, and independence movement activist in the early 20th century. As an independent movement activist, he claimed that Dangun was the original ancestor of all Koreans. He also argued that Korea has a proud history of a large territory and powerful kingdoms in ancient times. For him, historiography was not only about academic discourse but also about a tool for the independence movement.

After liberation, Korea-based historians tried to find historical evidence to reconstruct their history and culture. They managed to find historical pieces of evidence such as a sprout of capitalism, historical development by the commoners and culture, and so on. They seemed to research Korean history and culture with a sense of mission, which was their cross to bear. That was what Korean history and culture meant to Korean scholars at least until the 1980s. It was from the 1990s that they started to research it on the global, ecological, and climate basis. So, it comes as no surprise that not a few international scholars are not on the same wavelength. They were on the same page, however, in that history should be evaluated by verifying the level of development. It seemed to me that they paid little attention to the people, their way of thinking, and the dreams and desire. Yu Hyŏngwŏn, one of the leading literati in the late Joseon dynasty, and his book *Pan'gyesurok* can be an excellent example of what I want to share. This book is one of the most representative works of statecraft published and distributed in wood-block editions. There is a tendency to see the book as a progressive alternative aimed at social reform. But some argue that it is rather excessive to regard this work as a symbol of practical learning (*Silhak*) or evidence of internal development since the writer mod-

eled his reform plan after ancient China. These two ideas, drawn from trends of research conducted in Korea and elsewhere, are unfortunately in a collision. However, with some sober reflection, these two opposing claims seem to be two sides of the same coin. When it comes to how to characterize this reform plan, they were polar opposite. As far as the standard of evaluation itself is concerned, however, I am afraid they were on the same wavelength.

My point in discussing this is that the vital issue is the concerns of the writer expressed in this book. What is important is that he valued the traditional order of Confucian classics, and, as a neo-Confucian scholar, he made efforts to acquire morality in daily practice. From the early days, he viewed the Chinese pronunciation of Chinese characters as the right sound of the Sino-centric civilization(中華). He never accepted the world order, of which Qing China is at the center because he viewed Qing China as the enemy of Sino-centric civilization. From his perspective, Sino-centric civilization meant not only the lifestyle that the Han tribes had inherited on the Chinese continent but also the Confucian idea and ideology that he thought contain universal moral principles.

To him, Kija was equivalent to the Sinocentric civilization. The most important feature of this era was the growing sense that Joseon is the sole successor to the Sino culture. The Kija well-field system as a remainder of the Yin dynasty became an icon representing the only remaining Sinocentric civilization under such historical conditions. So, it was natural that his idea of statecraft, which started from the well-field system, expanded to aim for the restoration of Sino culture in the Korean peninsula.

My suggestion is that there is no need to identify the past with the present, no matter how indispensable it is to characterize Korean history and culture. The remaining question is, of course, what is that got to do with how Koreanology can help better the world. My answer is that researching Korean history is about whether it can help reflect on ourselves. Koreanology is about whether it can make everyone free from an anachronism, teleology, and dichotomy, which are also the key features of humanity studies. By sharing this idea, we can navigate our way throughout the morass to raise awareness of communication and make this world a better place to live.

What Koreanology means to a Korea-based historian Woosung Bae (University of Seoul)  
Hi there. It is my great pleasure to be here. So, when I got a notice on the world humanity forum and the fascinating theme, I felt that there is no room for a Korea-based historian like me to contribute to the forum. I thought to myself What is that got to do with a Korean historian like me who has no global academic career, a Korean scholar like me who has researched Korean history here in this country in Korean. Unlike other diligent scholars, I never tried to characterize Koreanology, to be honest. I hardly tried to convey my message in English. But suddenly, I realized that now is about time to do anything to pull my weight. Never in my dream did I expect that I join a forum to make my voice heard to the international audience, though. For me, joining this conference is like breaking through the communication barrier.

Anyway, let me stop beating around the bush and cut to the chase. Today, I would like to start by browsing the modern history of historiography in Korea. What did Korea-based historians want to find researching Korean history? What did it mean to them? Then I will turn to a brief discussion of a Joseon literati Yu Hyŏngwŏn, and his book Pan'gyesurok. Without a doubt, I am just a midget compared to the leading scholars in this country and around the world, but I think that does not necessarily mean that I do not deserve to do this before doing as much work as they did. And I will wrap up my talk with my humble perspective on how Koreanology, including Korean history, can help better the world.

According to what Koreans often say, they are all descendants of Dangun and are also a people with a long history of 5,000 years. Koreans are proud of defending their country against numerous foreign invasions. Although now divided into North and South, Koreans have lived in a unified nation for more than a thousand years. That is why they think South and North should be one someday in the future. It is a nation that has contributed to the development of civilizations in East Asia and even the world by accepting and self-improving Chinese culture and disseminating it to the surrounding countries. Koreans invented metal type before Gutenberg and have made Hangeul and use it with Chinese characters.

When it comes to browsing the history of the modern historiography of Korea, we need to start with Shin Chaeho, a leading historian, journalist, and independence movement activist in the early 20th century. It was when Korea was on the brink of being erased

in the world map that he agonized how to survive from extinction. He wanted to find a way in the dog eat dog world. So, as an independent movement activist, he claimed that Dangun was the original ancestor of all Koreans. By doing so, he could consolidate the Korean people and encourage them to fight against Imperial Japan. As a historian, he argued that Korea has a proud history of a large territory. He also asserted that Korea has powerful kingdoms that could expel the Chinese Invaders in ancient times. For him, historiography was not only about academic discourse but also about a tool for the independence movement.

The problem is, though, Imperial Japan seriously distorted Korean history during the colonial period, from 1910 to 1945. They characterized Korea as a stagnant, subordinate, and factional nation, with which Koreans felt least at ease. That is why most of the Korea-based historians in the 1960s and the 1970s spent time and effort finding historical evidence to nullify the distorted image. They were also committed to constructing a historical discourse, called internal development theory later. They claimed that Korea was following the same path of historical development as the European countries did. What they expected to find in the late Joseon dynasty was a kind of sprout of capitalism. The authoritarian government at the time also tried to rescue Korean history from the mire. What it mainly emphasized, however, was the history of protecting the country from invaders. In the 1980s, Korea-based historians reconstructed the internal development theory. Recognizing the power of the people to democratize Korean society, they started to clarify that the commoner de facto people had been the driving force of historical development. They described how the people struggled against the regime to free itself from the pre-modern ball and chain. What they emphasized was people power rather than a sprout of capitalism.

It was in the 1990s that with the collapse of the cold war system, historical research in Korea also diversified. It comes as no surprise that with the change of discourse landscape, they turned their attention to depicting the Korean way of life, the Korean way of thinking in a little different direction. Some were inclined to focus on the cultural, intellectual history of the micro-level. Others were interested in researching Korean history on the global, ecological, and climate basis. Compared to the past, they paid less attention to characterizing Korean history and culture, which is still popular with the public,

though. Ironically, it was also in the 1990s that the Korean government tried to globalize its culture. We will discuss it later.

Throughout the modern history of historiography, Koreans characterized its history and culture in various ways. To put it in a nutshell, what Koreans assumed is that Korea has been a homogenous country, which has no less than 5,000 years of history. What they found was the history of struggle against foreign powers, history of internal development, and the historical evidence that can justify upcoming unification between North and South. I speculate that they studied Korean history and culture with a sense of mission, which was their cross to bear. That was what Korean history and culture meant to Korean scholars. What the Korea-based scholars found was what they expected to find. So, it comes as no surprise that not a few international scholars are not on the same wavelength. Like Korea-based scholars had done, they also tried to characterize Korean history and culture. Some wanted to find the commonalities and discrepancies among east Asian countries. One of the leading historians in the United States, for example, saw the slave population of no less than 30%, centralized but weak monarchs, and the long-lasting dynasties, which may seem a bit negative rather than positive aspects of Korean history. That is why his meticulous research is somewhat unpopular with Korea-based historians. What he tried to find was a nutshell that shows the difference between Korea and neighboring countries like China and Japan, though.

Before we go any further, let me clarify one more point. It was from the 1990s that Koreans started to see how to characterize and globalize Korean indigenous culture. The Korean musical called the last Empress could be a good example. I guess that the message of the musical was that modernization and cultural competitiveness should root in their own culture, including shaman rite. Interestingly, people interpreted the shamanic tradition in the opposite direction in a hundred years. This story started in 1896. The editor of the first English newspaper in Korea claimed Korea should wipe out the shamanic rite for the sake of humanity. What is imperative in this episode is to see the differences and similarities between the two. When it comes to the evaluation of the non-western tradition and ethnic elements, they were in the opposite direction. But I guess that they were on the same wavelength in the sense that modernization means spreading local knowledge to others. Ironically, it seemed to me that the director paid little attention

to the indigenous audience, like the missionaries and the Korean American activists, including Jason Seo, did in the late 19th century here in this peninsula.

The reason why I introduced this episode is that it seems to me that academia at home and abroad who have researched Korean history has also seen similar phenomena. Regarding Korean history, Korean scholars focused on the drastic change and remarkable development, while many, if not most international scholars emphasized sustainability and stability. As we discussed a while ago, the critical point is to recognize the similarities between Korean scholars and international researchers. While they were apples and oranges regarding the evaluation of the development stage, they were on the same page in that history should be evaluated by verifying the level of development. But ironically, it appears to me that they paid little attention to the people, their way of thinking, and the dreams and desire.

Now, let me go back to my previous point. I mean, it is imperative to know that there have been some discrepancies between Korea and international-based academia. There is no doubt about it. From my perspective, however, it is equivalently crucial that the difference we found comes from the question on how to characterize Korean history and culture, and the very question is not all that we can ask when we talk about Koreanology. I guess that there may be something that we missed when we ask questions about Korean history and culture.

So, this brings me up to my next point, and that is how we can widen our intellectual horizon and reach common ground when reading historical documents. And I think Yu Hyŏngwŏn, one of the leading literati in the late Joseon dynasty, and his book *Pan'gye-surok* can be an excellent example of what I want to share.

As you may or may not know, this book is one of the most representative works of statecraft published and distributed in wood-block editions. Researchers have displayed an interest in this book from early on. However, the evaluation of its proposals is quite mixed. There is a tendency to see the book as a progressive alternative aimed at social reform. But some argue that it is rather excessive to regard this work as a symbol of practical learning (*Silhak*) or evidence of internal development since the writer modeled his reform plan after ancient China. These two ideas, drawn from trends of research

conducted in Korea and elsewhere, are unfortunately in a collision. However, with some sober reflection, these two opposing claims seem to be two sides of the same coin. When it comes to how to characterize this reform plan, they were apples and oranges. As far as the standard of evaluation itself is concerned, however, I am afraid they were on the same wavelength.

What I am saying is that we need to do something to widen our horizon. So here is my idea. Some five years ago, I happened to read this book in terms of the hierarchy and context of knowledge. Standing at this point, I think that the vital issue is the concerns of the writer expressed in this book. What I was asking is; In what context was this book written? How is the series of reformist ideas Yu intended to present throughout this book related to Sino-centrism, which I think is a sort of common sense at the time? My point in discussing this is that nothing is more important than reading his statecraft at the level of his own eyes. So let me be more specific on that.

Yu Hyŏngwŏn was well-versed not only in military, music, astronomy, geography, medicine, and fortune-telling but also in various foreign languages, state of affairs, international customs, Buddhism, and Taoism, and even in the ancient Chinese poetry. That was probably the case because he was self-learned and well-distanced from the academic factional binding force in Seoul after he retreated to the countryside.

Of course, being in a liberal environment was not without the principles of reading. He valued the traditional order of Confucian classics, and, as a neo-Confucian scholar, he made efforts to acquire morality in daily practice. From the early days, he viewed the Chinese pronunciation of Chinese characters as the right sound of the Sino-centric civilization(中華). He sincerely hoped that the Sino culture had survived in mainland China, even after the collapse of the Ming dynasty. It was in 1667 that a boat from Fujian province of China had drifted to Jeju Island. You went to see the drifters, tried to communicate with them by speaking Chinese, anxious to obtain information regarding the contemporary situation of the Southern Ming regime. He had not given up hope for the government-in-exile who advocated the revival of the Ming Dynasty.

Now listening to my talk, you may think that he worshiped China from the bottom of his heart. Now do not get me wrong. Am I saying that he was a toady to China? No, never. He never accepted the world order, of which Qing China is at the center because he viewed

Qing China as the enemy of Sino-centric civilization. From his perspective, Sino-centric civilization meant not only the lifestyle that the Han tribes had inherited on the Chinese continent but also the Confucian idea and ideology that he thought contain universal moral principles. And again, am I saying that he was a flunky to Ming China? No, never. Then, am I saying that he missed Ming China? Partly Yes. He regarded Ming China as the successor of the Sino-centric civilization. He also wished its restoration in the Chinese continent someday in the future.

It led him to think of how to live, how to study, and how to reconstruct his own country. He proposed to combine knowledge with action because he had dreamed of a study with realistic and practical usage. The main concerns flowing beneath the surface of his book were like What do we know, and how should we act upon it? According to his reasoning, the rectification of the land system will not only serve as an opportunity to solve social problems but will ultimately lead to the implementation of enlightenment and rituals. In other words, the disorder of the land system has prevented the rule of right(王道) to be performed and eventually led barbarians to disrupt civilization and people to fall into ruin. The world that he had yearned was a world with policies based on the rule of right embodied by enlightenment and rituals, thus a civilized world unaffected by barbarians.

He claimed that the world turned into chaos because the morals of sages failed to manifest. It was since the death of the Duke of Chou(周公). Then, after Mencius died, no one remembered the teachings of sages. Thousands of years later, during the Song Dynasty, genuine Confucius scholars emerged and studied the sacred discipline but could not restore the morals in their days. Such conditions have continued to this day, and eventually, barbarians violated the Sinocentric order, which resulted in a disturbance of the whole universe.

He then revealed the limitations within various alternatives which had emerged to resolve this abnormal situation. From his perspective, there are periods of peace and turbulence in history, and yet the moral legacy of sages is ageless in theory. However, it is the polar opposite in reality. Some scholars argue that since times are different, the policy of benevolence and morals of sages have no viability in the current state. Others assert that they need to use not only the rule of right but also the rule of force, due to the

change of age. The measures mentioned above all merely aim for wealth and power and can never achieve the much-admired ruling of the Chou dynasty.

He asked himself. Under these circumstances, is there a way to re-establish the morals of sages and their teachings? He found clues from the Rites of Chou(周禮). He rediscovered the value of this book, which was so highly praised by Chǒng Dojǒn(鄭道傳) in the early stages of the Joseon dynasty. But since the Rites of Zhou could never be a perfect model, the sole solution was to write a new book on statecraft grounded on it. Then, he asked himself again. If statecraft studies were to implement the morals of sages in the present-day, where to start? He thought the land problem was the place. He took note of the well-field system(井田制) initiated by King Wen of Zhou(周文王) described in Mencius. If the well-field system was the general outline, then all the other issues are smaller details. If a square piece of land can be divided into nine well-shaped(井) sections, allowing people to reside on it and to secure some of their income as national revenue, it would not be difficult to resolve the remaining social problems.

Then where can specific models of the well-field system be found? He argued that the trace of the Yin dynasty was encountered surprisingly in Joseon because the relics of the well-field system remained in P'yǒngyang, the old capital of Kija(箕子). Kija fled from China and became the founding father of the Sinocentric civilization in and around the Korean peninsula. He envisioned that the well-field system was not only fundamentally based on the institutions of the Zhou dynasty but also influenced by the well-field system of Kija.

To him, Kija was equivalent to the Sinocentric civilization. The most important feature of this era was the growing sense that Joseon is the sole successor to the Sino culture. The Kija well-field system as a remainder of the Yin dynasty became an icon representing the only remaining Sinocentric civilization under such historical conditions. So, it was natural that his idea of statecraft, which started from the well-field system, expanded to aim for the restoration of Sino culture in the Korean peninsula.

As his rediscovery of Kija proceeded, the more increased his interest became in Korean history. While there is no history book written in his name, he did compose an essay, where he tried to apply a specific historiographical format in organizing Korean history. However, writing history from Dangun(檀君) to the early Three Kingdoms proved to

be a problem, since there was no documentary evidence to confirm the date of their existence. He thought that he could manage to deal with this historical period in a supplementary manner, such as a postscript after the articles regarding the early stages of Three Kingdoms, or as an independent series before the main text, which would be comparable to Zhu Xi's book.

It was not that there were absolutely no documentary materials available regarding the matter. However, Yu disapproved of the history before the Three Kingdoms described in Korean history books of the period, because they occasionally contained somewhat preposterous ideas. He insisted that eliminating all mythical narratives, including the myth of Dangun, was the proper thing to do. He undoubtedly admitted the existence of Dangun, saying, Dangun was the first king of the east, and it was his divine virtue that made his people enthrone him as king. But it is not necessary to continue passing on unbelievable stories such as the Dangun mythology to our descendants. That was his viewpoint on Dangun.

As we already browsed, he was a typical follower of Sino-centrism. The sentiment of maintaining fidelity to the Ming China and seeking revenge on Qing China on behalf of Ming and the tendency to see Joseon as the sole successor to the Sino-centric culture indeed transcended schools and factions throughout the seventeenth Century in Joseon. Moreover, he was the first scholar to interpret Kija as not only a symbol for Sino-centric culture but also a principle for statecraft. He was also a historian who considered Korean history as a successor of Sino-centric civilization and statecraft. His book is a monographic work integrated with his various concerns.

That is what I found while reading this book. Tied with this, by the way, is my humble perspective on how Koreanology, including Korean history, help me raise awareness of communication, and how Koreanology can help better the world. So, let us get back to the previous point to start.

It is true that Korea-based historians who value social practice have intervened in social issues related to history or participated in social movements. They also established cultural policies required by the state, local governments, or civil society and contributed to the cultural industry. Building the framework of the entire Korean history based on

the perspective required by that era was both an academic discourse and social practice. They have also tried to get closer to public concerns. Some researched a letter of a wife containing her desperate love for her past husband. Others introduced a parenting diary of a grandfather, who wrote down his love for his grandson. Some claimed that Koreans should revitalize the scholar culture and scholarship of the Joseon dynasty. Others argued that they should clarify who is held responsible for the ruin of the country. I guess that in all these scenes, the density of communication was high because we are also children, parents, husbands, or wives of somebody. It is also because we are living in a harsh reality and a fluctuating international order as they were.

The sticking point is, I have hesitated to take this type of communication, to be honest. That is because I could not fully convince myself with such a way of communication. For Korean historians who value social practice and public communication, history was more likely to be a tool to reflect their wishes and fantasies. In that they live in the present, their attempt is justifiable per se. From my humble perspective, however, for history to become a mirror reflecting the present, one premise must be satisfied. The past must be one that connects with the present or has the same conditions as the present. It is at this point that I am a little puzzled. Is history always something like that? My answer is, without a doubt, No.

So, here is my idea, which may be propitious to others, but still valuable for me. From my perspective, it is worth noting that the past may be somewhat stranger than we imagine. Time is like a wizard who makes the meaning of many things differently. The number, type, and size of the variables are not the same. That is the difference in context. If it is the case, it is crucial not to avoid or ignore the weird feeling that the time creates. That is why I always try not to skip over time. I do not identify the past with the present, no matter how valuable the theory is. I always try not to project my wishes and fantasies into the past, no matter how indispensable it is to characterize Korean history and culture. I accept the constraints of time as it is, revealing the past. So, in the end, I hope I can describe the present Korean society from a long-term perspective. I hope I can find a way to read Korean history and culture in their context, and then depict how it is connected or reinterpreted.

The remaining question is, of course, what is that got to do with how Koreanology can

help better the world. Let me wrap up my talk by answering this question. I believe that researching Korean history is about whether it can help reflect on ourselves. Koreanology is about whether it can make everyone free from an anachronism, teleology, and dichotomy, which I think are also the key features of humanity studies. By sharing this idea, I firmly believe that we can navigate our way throughout the morass to raise awareness of communication and make this world a better place to live. Thank you for listening.