

Korean Studies between the Social Sciences and Historical Studies: *Debates over Modern and Contemporary Korean History**

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Abstract

This study focuses on the interdisciplinary moves made by the social sciences and historical studies regarding modern and contemporary Korean history. These moves began in earnest from the 1980s to analyze the dynamic development process of Korean studies. The periods analyzed as part of this study were marked by two dramatic transitions in academic trends. The first was that of the 1980s to the mid-1990s, a period in which a huge epistemological transition took place in the nationalism and internal development-based paradigm of historical studies, as well as in the developmentalism and modernization paradigm of social sciences. The second transition took place in the late 1990s, in which cultural approaches to history challenged traditional methods, and new paradigms based on postmodernity, postnationalism, and postcolonialism emerged. This study analyzes the academic activities and journals of two organizations that have continuously played a major role in informing the direction of modern and contemporary Korean history since the 1980s, namely the Korean Social History Association and the Institute for Korean Historical Studies.

Keywords: Korean studies, Korean Social History Association, Institute for Korean Historical Studies, sociology of knowledge

* I would like to thank the scholars Ha Won-ho, Park Chan Seung, Jung Keunsik, Lee Yong-ki, Jung Joon Young, and Cho Hyung Keun as well as the anonymous reviewers who read the rough draft of this paper and provided helpful comments.

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Epistemological Transitions in the Study of Modern and Contemporary Korean History

What kinds of arenas for intellectual discourse have been created by the Korean social sciences and historical studies? How have they interacted with one another amidst the various themes addressed as part of the study of modern and contemporary Korean history?¹ The subjects that must be analyzed in order to answer these questions represent the core fields of discussion in the Korean humanities and social sciences, fields that have had a profound influence on the features of Korean studies since the 1980s—namely the social formation theory, colonial modernization theory, pre- and post-history of Korean independence, compressed modernization, and the theory of an East Asian society. In order to explain the dramatic changes that have taken place within Korean studies, it is necessary to analyze the complex interactions between structural and subjective factors, which encompass not only changes in domestic and international academia but also shifts in international politics at large. As part of its research strategy to effectively expose the varied and complicated nature of social and academic dynamics, this study limits its range of analysis to the activities and publications of academic organizations that meet the following three conditions. First, the relevant academic organizations must fall under the category of those whose main field of study is modern and contemporary Korean history. Second, the pertinent academic organizations must have begun their academic activities during the 1980s, and not only still be active today but continue to wield intellectual and social influence. Third, the selected academic organizations must be characterized by a high degree of interdisciplinary communication and convergence between the social sciences and historical studies.

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1. Korean historians generally date the beginning of modern Korean history to the opening of Korean ports to Japan in 1876 and its contemporary era to the liberation from Japanese colonial rule in 1945. The controversy over the difference between modern and contemporary history is an independent subject not covered in the current study.

Groups engaged in the study of modern and contemporary Korean history include academic associations and research institutes of various stripes and orientations. While the list includes such notables as the Korean History Research Association (Hanguk Yeoksa Yeonguhoe), the Association for Korean Modern and Contemporary History (Hanguk Geunhyeondaesa Hakhoe), the Association for the Historical Studies on Korean National Movement (Hanguk Minjok Undongsa Hakhoe), and the Institute of Historical Studies (Yeoksahak Yeonguso). I select the Korean Social History Association (Hanguk Sahoesa Hakhoe) and the Institute for Korean Historical Studies (Yeoksa Munje Yeonguso) as the academic organizations which satisfy the above-mentioned three conditions and, as such, will have their long-term trends compared and analyzed. Both of these organizations were founded on the objective of conducting studies on modern and contemporary Korean history. Since the 1980s, both organizations have played a significant role in producing the items on the above-mentioned academic agenda, but clear differences can be observed between the two in terms of characteristics, human resources structure, and academic and political orientations.² Based on the main publications of these organizations, this paper attempts to analyze the historicity and contemporaneity of Korean historical studies, which lie between the social sciences and historical studies. Moreover, a review of recent trends in domestic and international academic research in more broadly related fields will also be utilized from the standpoint of the sociology of knowledge.

For convenience of analysis, this study divides the transitions towards new academic paradigms that developed in the field of modern and contemporary Korean history from the 1980s to the present into two periods. Although the standards used to divide these periods will be discussed in more detail in the latter part of this paper, the first period can broadly be identified as spanning from the mid-1980s

2. For an introduction to these two academic organizations, please refer to the homepages of the Korean Social History Association (<http://www.sociohistory.org>) and the Institute for Korean Historical Studies (<http://www.kistory.or.kr>).

to the mid-1990s. In this period, a significant epistemological transition emerged simultaneously in the nationalist paradigm and the internal development paradigm promoted by the national history circles and in the developmentalism and modernization paradigm promoted by the social sciences circles, both of which had been dominant through the 1960s and 1970s. The second period, spanning from the late 1990s to date, can be considered a time in which cultural approaches to history challenged traditional methods while the paradigms of postmodernity, postnationalism, and postcolonialism were established as dominant strands.³

However, before analyzing these two periods in a more in-depth manner, attention should be drawn to the fact that the domestic academic sector's interest in modern and contemporary Korean history reached a new peak from the 1980s onwards. Why was the history that unfolded in Korea in the aftermath of the March 1st Independence Movement of 1919 not significantly studied or taught until the late 1970s? (Seo 1993, 102-105). The familiar explanation that modern history should be the target of the social sciences rather than that of historical studies is both lacking and inappropriate for a Korean academic sector that was characterized up until the late 1970s as disinterested in the subject matter. This attitude can also be extended to the social sciences. The emergence in the 1980s of new viewpoints and awarenesses regarding this topic constitutes both a very dramatic phenomenon and frames the historical background to the establishment of the Korean Social History Association as well as the Institute for Korean Historical Studies.

3. This periodic separation is the result of a consideration of various variables pertaining to social and intellectual histories, which will be discussed in the latter section of this study. Nevertheless, it is based on the judgment that the Gwangju Uprising of 1980 and the collapse of the socialist system circa 1990 decisively influenced the studies and interpretation of contemporary Korean history in the aftermath of liberation in 1945. These views have already been presented in Jung and Kong (1995, 106).

Two Different Points of Departure: Nationalistic Historical Studies and Transplanted Social Sciences Studies

Let us begin by examining the flow of Korean historical studies prior to the 1980s before analyzing the situation in the social sciences. Nationalism theory exercised the most influence within Korean historical studies during the early 1960s. The April 19 Revolution of 1960 provided a decisive opportunity for intellectuals, who had been trapped by the anticommunist ideology that was perpetuated until the late 1950s, to rediscover the “nation.” Thereafter, national historians identified the purging of the legacy of Japanese colonialism-based historical studies as the main priority in the 1960s, and focused on overcoming the heteronomy and stagnation theories advanced as part of colonial history (Noh 1991, 1-38). The internal development theory, which represented the fruit of this new awareness, was focused on countering the colonial view of history by emphasizing the fact that the social changes of the late Joseon period pointed to Korea moving in the direction of modernity. The emergence of the development of agricultural productivity and the rise of rich farmers on the one hand, and on the other the disintegration of the peasant class and the worsening of class conflicts have led to the discovery that indigenous changes had in fact taken place in the traditional structure and order of agrarian society of the late Joseon period. As such, the internal development theory was developed as a strand of research that sought to discover the seeds of capitalism within traditional society.⁴ This theory organizes national history by focusing on the uniqueness of Korean history based on the assumption of universality known as the developmental process of global history (I. Kim 1997, 131).

This field of anticolonial nationalist historical studies, whose members shared the idea that the internal development theory is a “hidden god” (H. Yun 2010, 36-67), underwent internal divisions

4. For examples of studies based on the internal development theory, carried out in the fields of agriculture, commerce, and handicrafts during the late Joseon period, please refer to Y. Kim (1970-71); M. Kang (1973); and C. Song (1973).

amidst the increase in political oppression and in the disparities that marked the distribution structure of the 1970s. During these years, the Park Chung-hee regime sought to have Korean historians serve as trumpeters of nationalist ideology by advocating nationalistic and reactionary views of national history. However, some progressive historians responded to the monopolizing of national history by the Yushin dictatorship by creating a new field of historical studies that advocated the role of the *minjung* (people) as the main actors in history. The notion of *minjung*,⁵ which was first discussed in the social sciences as part of the emergence of labor and agrarian movements during the 1970s, also influenced the historical studies sector through the development of *minjung sahak* (people's history). In this regard, the Gwangju Uprising of 1980 confirmed the historicity of this notion of *minjung* that had been ambiguously established during the 1970s.

The 1980s can be rightfully identified as the era of *minjung sahak* (people's history).⁶ Three historical organizations advocating the establishment of progressive historical studies—the Korean History Research Association, the Institute of Historical Studies, and the Institute for Korean Historical Studies—were founded in the late 1980s.⁷ The Korean History Research Association was the largest of the three. Founded in 1988 and advocating the advent of more scientific and

5. For more on the notion of *minjung*, please refer to Han (1981).

6. This period in Korean historical studies can be regarded as one in which the flows of various undercurrents opposed to the “empirical positivism” advocated by “national academies,” such as the Keijo Imperial University and the Korean History—Compilation Committee during the Japanese colonial period and the history department of Seoul National University after liberation, exploded onto the scene as part of the emergence of *minjung sahak* (people's history). It was during this period that the academic conflicts between the likes of Kim Yong-Sup (Yonsei University), Kang Man-gil (Korea University), Seo Joongseok (Sungkyunkwan University) and Lee Yi-hwa (private historian) with mainstream national historians represented by the Lee Byeong-do School of Historical Studies came to a head. Further in-depth research that requires more advanced competence than that of this author needs to be carried out as far as the study of the intellectual flows of Korean historical studies is concerned.

7. For more on the activities of these three historical organizations up to the 1990s, please refer to C. Park (1998, 15-23).

practical historical studies, the Korean History Research Association was established by individuals from the Institute for Korean Modern History (Hanguk Geundaesa Yeonguhoe), Mangwon Institute for Korean History (Mangwon Hanguksa Yeongusil) and individual researchers in the field of ancient and medieval history. Since its founding, this organization has steadily pursued the development of *minjung*-oriented Korean history through such means as the publication of its journal *Yeoksa-wa hyeonsil* (History and Reality) since 1989.⁸ For its part, the Institute of Historical Studies was founded by individuals from the Kuro Institute of History (Guro Yeoksa Yeonguso), which was founded in 1988. Contrary to the Korean History Research Association, the Institute of Historical Studies has, since inception, advocated the establishment of an organization composed of historical researchers that can directly contribute to reform through activities geared towards the masses.⁹

The Institute for Korean Historical Studies, which opened its door in February 1986, shares many similarities with the Korean History Research Association and the Institute of Historical Studies in terms of foundational background and practical orientation.¹⁰ The selection of the Institute for Korean Historical Studies as one of the main subjects for analysis was motivated by two factors. First, while the Korean History Research Association and the Institute of Historical Studies have taken a comprehensive approach to the study of history, the Institute for Korean Historical Studies has focused on modern and contemporary history. It has also since its founding managed to wield significant social and intellectual influence. This has been achieved by deepening the academic debates pertaining to modern and contemporary Korean history, and expanding perceptions of historical issues via its journal *Yeoksa bipyeong* (Critical Review of

8. Please refer to the homepage of the Korean History Research Association (<http://www.koreanhistory.org>).

9. Please refer to the homepage of the Institute of Historical Studies (<http://www.ihs21.org>).

10. For more on this matter, please refer to Institute for Korean Historical Studies (1996, 54-83).

History).¹¹ Second, the Institute for Korean Historical Studies is an interdisciplinary organization which is open not only to those who majored in Korean history, but also to those from a variety of fields from the humanities and social sciences, including sociology, politics, and literature. Despite this diversity in terms of academic disciplines, the members of the institute have all shared the desire to participate in radical social reforms by developing a critical approach to a field of contemporary Korean history, which had heretofore been omitted from the mainstream academic sector's research.

If the activities of the Institute for Korean Historical Studies can be regarded as the result of scrutiny of the nationalistic approach to Korean history, then those of the Korean Social History Association should be perceived from a sociological standpoint, characterized by academic interventions on the social shifts that occurred during this period. While the Gwangju Uprising of 1980 provided the decisive opportunity to establish *minjung sahak* as a new influential field in Korean historical studies, the experiences of May 1980 also played a role in bringing about a Copernican-like paradigm shift in the social sciences. In this regard, the influence of the Gwangju Uprising of 1980 on historians and social scientists in Korea during the 1980s was similar to the kind of influence the Vietnam War had on intellectuals in the United States during the 1970s.¹² That being the case, the question then becomes one of identifying the state of the Korean social sciences at the time of this transformation.

During the 1940s-1950s, a period when Korea experienced such epochal events as liberation, the founding of the nation, and the Korean War, social sciences in Korea proved unable to break away from the values of anticommunism, anti-North Korea, and liberal democracy. The quantitative growth of universities that followed the Korean War was accompanied by a new phenomenon that saw West-

11. For more on the activities of the Institute for Korean Historical Studies from its foundation to 2005, please refer to Institute for Korean Historical Studies (2006, 144-167).

12. For more on the influence of the Gwangju Uprising in the Korean social sciences field, please refer to Choi (1999).

ern, particularly mainstream American, academia emerge as the main influence on Korea's intellectual community from the 1960s onwards.¹³ Under the Park Chung-hee dictatorship, modernization theory served as the scientific logic used by state elites to justify developmental ideology, and also became the main tool with which to perpetuate their rule. The combination of three elements, namely the inherent limitations of an unconditional anticommunist ideology, the blind acceptance of theories emanating from the United States, and the efforts of groups opposed to exposing the past, resulted in Korean sociology being characterized by an ahistorical approach until the 1970s (J. Kim 1983).

The emergence of the Yushin regime during the 1970s provided the impetus for the formation of a new anti-mainstream sector within the Korean humanities and social sciences. Social history began in earnest in the late 1970s and emerged as a counterweight to modernization theory and the structural-functionalist paradigm that dominated the social sciences at the time. Established in 1980, the Institute for Korean Social History (Hanguk Sahoesa Yeonguhoe)¹⁴ began with the academic desire to criticize the historical sociology theories that had been blindly imported into Korea and to establish a more critical and independent academic culture. As such, the Korean Social History Association exhibited different characteristics from other academic organizations¹⁵ that were created based on the progressive and re-

13. As of 1983, the number of Koreans who had obtained their Ph.D.s during the period of 1950-1980 stood at 18,409. Of these, 15,147 secured their Ph.D.s in the United States (D. Park 1983).

14. This organization was originally called the Institute for Korean Social History when it was founded in 1980. However, in keeping with the decision of the general assembly held in December 1994, its official name was changed to the Korean Social History Association in 1995.

15. Examples include the Korean History Research Association, Institute for Korean Historical Studies, Korean Institute for Research on Industrial Society (Hanguk Saneop Saho Yeonguhoe) founded in 1984, and the Korea Progressive Academy Council (Hanguk Haksul Danche Hyeobuihoe). Twenty-one humanities and social science organizations had become members of the Korea Progressive Academy Council by 1998 (Korea Progressive Academy Council 1998).

form-oriented academic mindset in the aftermath of the Gwangju Uprising of 1980. In other words, the Korean Social History Association was initially rooted in pure academic motivation to develop historical sociology by putting sociology and history in dialogue with each other, and by maintaining a healthy distance from the political upheavals that marked the 1980s.¹⁶

As such, both the Institute for Korean Historical Studies and the Korean Social History Association were initially founded with the aim of conducting research on modern and contemporary Korean history. However, their academic orientations were rooted in different social and intellectual backgrounds. The Institute for Korean Historical Studies was the result of a need to overcome the institutional climate that prevailed in the field of Korean history, which had been buried under nationalistic historical studies. Under the uneasy atmosphere of the Cold War, a divided nation structure, and military authoritarianism, all political risks were castrated. Meanwhile, by searching for concrete evidence (*silsa gusi* 實事求是), the Korean Social History Association wanted to indigenize the field of Korean sociology, which had heretofore been dominated by non-national and historical social science discourses. Moreover, while the Korean Social History Associ-

16. Conversely, the Korean Institute for Research on Industrial Society emerged as the representative of academic organizations that advocated active participation in social issues of the day. Founded in 1984, the institute advocated social changes through critical reform of the Korean social sciences and the conduct of progressive studies. Many progressive researchers from not only the field of sociology, but also those of economics and politics, participated in this organization during its early days. It also played a leading role in the establishment in 1988 of the Korea Progressive Academy Council, a coalition of progressive academic organizations in the fields of humanities & social sciences. That same year, it began to publish its journal, *Gyeongje-wa sahoe* (Economy and Society), which featured papers and research papers on such topics as industry and labor, social classes and strata, and social movements. The Korean Institute for Research on Industrial Society was renamed the Korean Industrial Sociological Association (Hanguk Saneop Sahoe Hakhoe) in 1996 as part of an overhaul that would establish it as a specialized academic organization. In 2007, it was once again renamed, this time as the Korean Critical Sociological Association (Bipan Sahoe Hakhoe). For more information, Please refer to the homepage of the Korean Critical Sociological Association (<http://www.sansahak.com>).

ation initially began its operations in 1980 based on an apolitical academic orientation, the Institute for Korean Historical Studies was, from its inception in 1986, characterized by a strong political will and orientation. Based on the identification of two distinct periods demarcated by the mid-1990s, let us now analyze the academic changes undergone by these two organizations, which were launched amidst different intellectual and social environments.

This temporal division is primarily motivated by changes wrought by the two organizations to their respective journals. In addition to its existing journal, *Yeoksa bipyeong* (Critical Review of History), the Institute for Korean Historical Studies began to publish a new journal titled *Yeoksa munje yeongu* (Critical Studies on Modern Korean History) in 1996. The introduction of this journal was motivated by the need for a new specialized academic journal that could be distinguished from the *Yeoksa bipyeong* designed to foster “public enlightenment” and “social communications.” However, the main reason behind the publication of this new journal was the marked need for a journal specializing in the field of modern and contemporary Korean history. This should be viewed in the same light as the Korean Social History Association’s decision in 1997 to abandon the *Hanguk sahoe-sa hakhoe nonmunjip* (Collection of Essays of the Korean Social History Association) published at irregular intervals in favor of a new regularly published journal titled *Sahoe-wa yeoksa* (Society and History) from volume 51 onwards following the organization’s rebirth as a government-recognized organization. Thus, academic organizations and journals in Korea began from the mid-1990s onwards to exhibit characteristics that differentiated them from the previous period. To understand the characteristics of such changes, it is necessary to analyze the changes that occurred from the 1980s to the early 1990s.

The First Transition: “Willingness to Bring about Realistic Reforms” versus “Withdrawal to the Colonial Period”

The origins of the Institute for Korean Social History can be traced

back to a study group organized in April 1980 by Professor Shin Yong-Ha and graduate school students from the Department of Sociology at Seoul National University. Viewed from a limited standpoint, this study group was rooted in the achievements of the “Korean Social History” course that had been offered by the Department of Sociology since 1975 and after the promotion of Seoul National University to the status of a comprehensive university and the relocation of the university to the Gwanak campus (Jung 2010, 1). From a broader perspective, the study group was rooted in the accumulated results of first generation scholars in the field of Korean social history such as Yi Sang-baek and Kim Du-heon, and second-generation scholars such as Kim Young-Mo, Park Yong-Shin, Shin Yong-Ha, Choe Jae-seok, and Choi Hong-Ki (P. Kim 1995). As part of its efforts to introduce the social history theories developed by scholars in Western Europe, the Institute for Korean Social History translated and published such works as *Sahoesa-wa sahoehak* (Social History and Sociology)¹⁷ and a translation of Philip Abrams’s *Historical Sociology*.¹⁸ Beginning in late 1986, it also began to publish the *Hanguk sahoesa yeonguhoe nonmunjip* (Collection of Essays of the Institute for Korean Social History), fifty volumes of which had been published by November 1996, spanning 279 papers written by 155 scholars.

In his quantitative study of the papers, Kim Pil-Dong stressed that although researchers from various fields, including sociology, history, politics, anthropology, economics, and linguistics, had participated in producing the papers, an overwhelming number of researchers were from the field of sociology. In addition, a chronological analysis of these papers revealed that the most commonly addressed period was the Japanese colonial era (30%), followed by papers dealing with contemporary history after the 1960s (18.5%). In terms of research subjects, the most popular were social movements and political histo-

17. It was authored by Shin Yong-Ha and published by Changjak-gwa Bipyongsu (present-day Changbi Publishers) in 1982.

18. It was translated by Shin Yong-Ha under the title *Yeoksa sahoehak* and published by Moonhak-gwa Jisungsa (present-day Moonji Publishing) in 1986.

ry, philosophy, ideology, and religion (18.5%). Moreover, such topics were followed by those related to the state, nation, and political structure (16.4%). Viewed from a diachronic standpoint, while volumes 1 to 21 published in the 1980s mainly consisted of studies on social movements, political history, and social classes and strata, volumes 22 to 50 published in the 1990s featured a significant number of studies on the state, nation, political systems, philosophy, ideology, and religion (P. Kim 1997, 349-363).

While the authors that appeared in the *Hanguk sahoesa yeongu-hoe nonmunjip* shared a homogenous academic background in sociology, those which fill the pages of the *Yeoksa bipyeong* come not only from the field of Korean history, but also from such disciplines as sociology, politics, and literature. In addition, the analysis of the special editions of the *Yeoksa bipyeong* that appeared since the organization's founding in 1987 to the mid-1990s leads to the identification of several specific characteristics. First, Kang Jeong-gu's analysis of the tenth anniversary edition of *Yeoksa bipyeong* revealed that studies dealing with modern and contemporary history accounted for 85.2% of the overall total. In this regard, studies concerning contemporary history after liberation made up 70.2% of the sum. In addition, Kang's examination of this tenth anniversary edition from the standpoint of genres revealed that there was a higher percentage of papers on the history of political and social movements (over 50%) than those on social, economic, or intellectual history, etc.¹⁹ An examination of the themes found in the thirty-nine special editions included in thirty-three volumes of *Yeoksa bipyeong* reveals that themes from two categories accounted for an overwhelming portion of such papers. While the first category involves North Korea and socialism, as well as division and unification, the second category revolves around social movements and the main actors implicated in reform. These two categories, which were the main themes in eight papers respectively, accounted for 41% of the overall works published. Here, one can see

19. Kang (1997, 326-336) analyzed forty-seven special issues that appeared from the first volume to volume 35 (winter 1996).

the strong will for intellectual rebellion, in the form of challenges to the social taboos of the day, and the desire to take part in society in a concrete manner.

The most significant differences between the Institute for Korean Social History and the Institute for Korean Historical Studies revealed through an analysis of their respective journals, namely *Hanguk sahoe-sa yeonguhoe nonmunjip* and *Yeoksa bipyeong*, are the authors' respective disciplinary backgrounds and their periods of interest. While the former can be regarded as a group that shares a common disciplinary interest, the latter is a group made up of individuals from various academic backgrounds, including history and the social sciences.²⁰ In addition, while the researchers from the association exhibited an interest in modern history and, in particular, in the Japanese colonial era, those from the institute proved to be interested in contemporary history after liberation and, more specifically, in issues related to the division of the nation. In comparison to studying the Japanese colonial structure, examining Korea's national division was a much more politically risky task under an anticommunist authoritarian government. Despite the diversity of academic backgrounds, the views of scholars from the institute collectively leaned towards political radicalism.²¹ An assessment of the academic achievements of the Institute for

20. An examination of the disciplines of eleven researchers who contributed papers to the special issue *Hanguk-ui geundae-wa geundaeseong bipan* (Korean Modernity and Criticism of Modernity) published by Yeoksa Bipyeongsa to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Institute for Korean Historical Studies in 1996 reveals that six were from the field of Korean history, three from politics, and two from sociology. Thus, half were social scientists, a finding that is consistent with the general trend in terms of the academic disciplines of those who contributed papers to the *Yeoksa bipyeong*.

21. Under a situation in which academia had yet to distinguish itself from society at large or to achieve specialization under the antidemocratic military government, the homogeneity of the political positions adopted by progressive academic organizations such as the Korea Progressive Academy Council, Korean Institute for Research on Industrial Society, Korean Social History Association, and the Institute for Korean Historical Studies proved to be as decisive in the promotion of solidarity amongst these organizations as in the commonality that existed in terms of research areas and majors.

Korean Social History and the Institute for Korean Historical Studies during the 1980s and early 1990s based on such factors yielded the following three characteristics.

First, this period is marked as one in which academic interest finally began to be paid to the social changes that had taken place during the Korean modern and contemporary era (from 1876 up to now), a topic that had heretofore not garnered any interest. Although some interest was shown in modern and contemporary history during the 1970s, it mostly focused on the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. This is evidenced by the studies of Lee Kwang-Lin and Shin Yong-Ha on the enlightenment group and enlightenment thought, and the debate between Shin Yong-Ha, Kang Man-gil, and Kim Yong-Sup regarding the Gwangmu Reform undertaken by the Great Han Empire. These researchers concentrated their studies on elements related to the enlightenment group and enlightenment thought, such as the Gapsin Coup, Gabo Reforms, and the Korean Independence Association, and approached such topics from the standpoint of the internal development theory (Koo 1994; C. Park 1994; Cho, Han, and Park 1994, 344). Meanwhile, a particular interest in the postcolonial history that unfolded after liberation in 1945 became evident in academic works conducted in the 1980s. These studies dealt with previously verboten subjects such as pro-Japanese factions, radical anticommunism, and *chaebol* (Korean corporate conglomerates) as part of a full-scale effort to analyze the characteristics of the Korean ruling class in the contemporary era, as well as to examine oppositional forces, such as the student and labor movements and socialist groups.

On the one hand, this shift in research topics can be interpreted as having been linked to the tasks faced by the practical and radical social movements of the day and their reform strategy. On the other, it can also be understood as being characteristic of the original research needed to foster the subsequent adoption of social change in modern and contemporary Korea as an object of long-term study. During the early days following its founding, the Korean Social History Association advocated the introduction and application of advanced theories

social history and historical sociology and, based on the “search for evidence” (*silsa gusi*), the indigenization of those theories. Yet, the majority of the papers published in the *Hanguk sahoesa yeonguhoe nonmunjip* were not substantially different from those published in the field of historical studies. Meanwhile, despite coming from diverse fields of study, the papers that appeared in *Yeoksa bipyeong* can be characterized as empirical studies that aimed to uncover historical facts rather than social science-based concepts and theories. This trend of the 1980s and early 1990s was a prevalent limitation in original studies available at the time.

Second, the two organizations paved the way for the advent of interdisciplinary research capable of challenging the mainstream in the fields of sociology and Korean history. As discussed above, in its efforts to bring about the indigenization of Western sociology, the Institute for Korean Social History introduced historical sociology theories from the Annales School in France as well as from British and American academia, while pursuing long-term empirical studies of macroscopic changes taking place within Korean society. Meanwhile, led by the Institute for Korean Historical Studies, interest in contemporary Korean history and, in particular, the postcolonial and Korean War eras of mid-1900s started in earnest with the publication of *Haebang jeonhusa-ui insik* (Perceptions of Korean History before and after Liberation) in 1979.²² In short, the study of modern and contemporary Korean history during the 1980s can be regarded as the onset of a new intellectual structure in a sphere that had remained empty in the field of Korean historical studies until the 1970s, through interdisciplinary communication between the social sciences and history based on new awareness.

22. Seo (1993, 109) has argued that the following three works played a pivotal role in the rapid increase in interest in contemporary Korean history during the 1980s: Kang Man-gil, *Bundan sidae-ui yeoksa insik* (The Perception of History in the Division Era) (Seoul: Changjak-gwa Bipyeongsa, 1978); Song Gun-ho et al., *Haebang jeonhusa-ui insik* (Perceptions of Korean History before and after Liberation) (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1979); and Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).

Third, this period was marked by the emergence of a new academic paradigm ushered in by the practical interest in social movements and political changes. Inspired by the Gwangju Uprising of 1980 to discover the possibility of new “resistance-based” or “alternative” knowledge, progressive researchers in the humanities and social sciences proceeded to solidify this knowledge base for progressive academics rooted in Marxism during the military government’s appeasement policy that began in 1983. In the aftermath of the democratization movement of June 1987, these scholars organized and institutionalized their progressive tendencies into an academic community. However, the 1980s also marked the ideological collapse of Marxism within the wider international community.²³ Having managed to buck the flow of global history and enjoyed a Marxist renaissance, progressive academics in Korea suddenly found themselves faced with a significant transition following the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent spread of capitalism on a global scale.²⁴

The rapid change in world events did not have the same type of impact on the Institute for Korean Social History as it did on the Institute for Korean Historical Studies. For the institute, which had shown a strong desire to participate in actual issues and to reform society,

23. In the late 1980s, Marxism in Korea found itself on the verge of collapse amidst the tremendous shock that was rocking the international community. It had only been less than ten years since it overcame a long-held taboo enforced by the military government and returned as a subject of intellectual activities, and less than five years since it was recognized as a basis for the works of progressive intellectuals.

24. Kim Dong-Choon has described the situation at the time as follows: “The 1980s can be regarded as having been a belated revolutionary era that from the very beginning was spurred on by the inherent limitations of introversion and self-centeredness. Rather than acquiescing to the prevailing global trends, these individuals, buoyed by the internal experience known as the Gwangju Uprising of 1980, focused an inordinate amount of attention on the notion of everything in its own time when dealing with the development of Korean history. . . . They failed to understand the great upheavals that were taking place from a global standpoint, such as the collapse of real socialism, the Reagan Revolution in the United States and the information revolution, as well as the economic depression and rigidity that overtook North Korea. As such, they were inevitably confused by the rapid changes that took place during the early 1990s” (D. Kim 2005, 1).

the collapse of socialism and the ideological opportunity known as the post-Cold War era had the biggest impact. Yet for the association, which had withdrawn to a more depressed and dark colonial reality while maintaining its distance from current issues, globalization and the geopolitical and geocultural opportunity called postmodernity proved to be more decisive factors. Although this will be discussed in the latter part of this paper, as far as the changes in the academic trends of these two organizations are concerned, while the former can be said to have undergone a direct change in its strategic theoretical practice goals, the latter underwent an indirect change that led to the expansion and diversification of its fields of interest and methodologies. However, despite these different opportunities and paths towards change, the changes underwent by these two organizations can be said to have a common orientation when viewed in retrospect. Let us now take a look at the detailed characteristics of such changes.

The Second Transition: Search for Alternatives to “National History”

The Korean Social History Association and the Institute for Korean Historical Studies underwent a similar change during the mid-1990s in terms of the type of activities and mediums they used. Until 1994, the Korean Social History Association was formerly known as the Institute for Korean Social History. Then in 1997, its journal, *Hanguk sahoesa yeonguhoe nonmunjip* (Collection of Essays of the Institute for Korean Social History) was replaced by a regularly published journal titled *Sahoe-wa yeoksa* (Society and History). While *Sahoe-wa yeoksa*, whose first issue was volume 51 that appeared in 1997, was published on a semi-annual basis until 2005, it then became a quarterly journal from the spring of 2006 onwards. For its part, the Institute for Korean Historical Studies created a new journal titled *Yeoksa munje yeongu* (Critical Studies on Modern Korean History) in 1996. This new journal was established separately from *Yeoksa bipyeong* (Critical Review of History), which was published as a quarterly jour-

nal since 1988. While the Institute had published only three issues of *Yeoksa bipyeong* till 1999, a semiannual publication schedule was subsequently adopted from 2000 onwards. The impact of establishing a specialized academic journal system and the changes underwent by these academic organizations from the mid-1990s onwards were also reflected in the changes that occurred in the characteristics of the papers published in their journals.

Let us take a look at the case of the Institute for Korean Social History. In his study, Park Myung-Kyu summarized the clear changes that occurred in the previous era, in which 1995 to 2005 issues of *Sahoe-wa yeoksa* were published, as follows: first, there was a marked decline in studies dealing with the social movements, industrial labor, and social strata and classes; second, there was also a decrease in the number of studies on the history of macro-institutions and policy and a concurrent increase in micro-subjects; third, there was a rapid increase in studies related to women; fourth, studies related to cultural history and everyday life also rapidly expanded; fifth, a relative increase was also evident in studies in the fields of religion and philosophy; and lastly, from a chronological standpoint, interest in the contemporary era had greatly increased at the expense of the Japanese colonial period that had constituted the most important subject prior to 1997 (M. Park 2006, 76-91).

These changes are also evident in Chae Ou-Byung's study. Chae analyzed the study trends evident in the journals published by the Korean Social History Association based on five categories: macro- and micro-history, social history and cultural history, research subjects, units of analysis, and period of analysis. Chae argued that from the mid-1990s onwards there was a noticeable move away from the study of macro-history and towards micro-history, as well as from social history to cultural history. Chae also found that there had been a move from hard history to soft history and from old social movements to new social movements. As far as the units of analysis were concerned, Chae found that although there was a preponderance of papers involving Korea, the ratio of such papers to the overall number of studies had nevertheless undergone a marked decrease. Final-

ly, in terms of analyzing certain eras, Chae's study revealed that while the number of studies on other periods had by and large remained the same, there had been a marked decrease in those dealing with the USAMGIK (the United States Army Military Government in Korea) period from 1945 to 1948. One interesting aspect uncovered by this study was when such changes in study trends became evident. For instance, while changes affecting the study of social strata and political economy began to surface in the early 1990s, those affecting the remaining fields only began to manifest in the mid-1990s (Chae 2010, 261-294).

Here, the changes in the study of social strata and political economy should be regarded as being intricately related to the rapid decline in the prevalence of Marxism amongst social science scholars. However, this change is also closely related to the decline in the interest in *minjung sahak* (people's history) that took place during this same period. These changes resulted from both international and domestic phenomena such as the advent of the post-Cold War era and democratization. The increasing specialization of domestic scholars, facilitated by the accumulation and expansion of the studies conducted by scholars also contributed to such changes. Additionally, this result was related to the growing influence of the Korea Research Foundation from the late 1990s onwards. During the year 1997, when *Sahoe-wa yeoksa* was launched, the Korea Research Foundation's financial support for Korean academia was greatly expanded, and many academic journals became funded by its management.²⁵ From

25. The Korea Research Foundation began to exercise a great influence over the humanities and social sciences in Korea in the late 1990s. Cheon Jeong-hwan has argued that it strengthened scholars' intellectual desire to undertake academic initiatives. Large-scale basic research projects that would have heretofore been impossible were carried out through its support system. It also had other positive effects such as the weakening of academic boundaries and the expansion of convergence research. On the other hand, it also produced side effects. By equalizing, unifying, and nationalizing the academic world, it placed all scholars and research under such a huge framework that all researchers became "state-scholars" who received research funds from the state, a denouement that in turn resulted in the replacement of "intellectuals" with "researchers" or "specialists" (Cheon 2010, 185-209).

this period on, financial support was provided based on a selection of journals (following a screening process) that had registered with the Korea Research Foundation. The changes in the journal of the Korean Social History Association were in keeping with the policies of the Korea Research Foundation. More to the point, its journal *Sahoe-wa yeoksa* was registered as a candidate with the foundation during the second half of 1998 and was officially approved by the foundation two years later.²⁶ The foundation's support also provided for the emergence of large-scale academic conferences organized by the Korean Social History Association from 1998 onwards.²⁷

The creation of *Yeoksa munje yeongu* in 1996 by the Institute for Korean Historical Studies can be regarded as a change made in accordance with the wider changes taking place within academia. In this regard, any attempt to review the changes undergone by the Institute for Korean Historical Studies during this period must inevitably involve an examination of its two journals, namely *Yeoksa bipyeong*

26. On the contrary, the Institute for Korean Historical Studies responded in a relatively belated manner to the Korea Research Foundation's oversight system. For instance, while *Yeoksa bipyeong* was registered with the Korea Research Foundation in 2005, it was not until 2008 that its other journal *Yeoksa munje yeongu* was registered with the Foundation.

27. The themes addressed during the regular academic conferences organized by the Korean Social History Association have since consisted of: "The Maintenance and Transformation of Korean Confucian Culture" (1998); "Koreans and Korean Society in the 20th Century" (1999); "Sociological Research on the Korean Family" and "The Social History of Seas and Islands" (2000); "The Social History of Knowledge Change" (2001); "The Social History of Eating and Drinking" (2001); "Koreans: Social History of the Body" (2002); "Japanese Imperial Rule and Changes in Everyday Life" and "The Social History of Culture and Communications" (2005); "The Formation and Experience of Colonial Public Spaces" and "Korean Families in the Transitional Period" (2006); "The Social History of Education and Examinations" (2007); "Emotions and Society—Sense of Modernity and Joseon Society during the Colonial Era" and "The Social History of Crisis within Korean Society" (2008); "The Reality of the National Community and Future Outlook Thereof—Social History of Division, Diaspora, and Stagnation" (2009); and "Changes in Everyday Life during the 100 years of the Korean Modern and Contemporary Era" and "Korea and Japan Relations over the Last 100 Years: With a Focus on Everyday Life and Culture" (2010).

and *Yeoksa munje yeongu*. One change exhibited in *Yeoksa bipyeong* from the late 1990s onwards is the weakening of academic character of its special editions in which papers on current topics²⁸ were frequently published. This phenomenon can be interpreted as the result of the division of labor occasioned by the creation of the specialized academic journal *Yeoksa munje yeongu*. The creation of *Yeoksa munje yeongu* was motivated by the necessity for a specialized journal that can be distinguished from mass journals, as well as by the rapid increase in the supply and demand for scholars in this particular field. More to the point, the rapid increase in interest in modern and contemporary Korean history from the late 1980s onwards resulted in the production of a high number of Ph.D.s in this area from the early 1990s on.

An analysis of the twenty-four special editions of *Yeoksa munje yeongu* that were published from 1996 to 2010 reveals several points of departure from *Yeoksa bipyeong*. The first is the rapid decrease of studies on pre- and post-liberation history as well as the Korean War, and the disappearance of discussions on North Korean society and the North-South division structure. There was also a marked decline in interest in the *minjung* movement and social reform. The second point is the increase in the ratio of studies on the Japanese colonial era and the significant decrease in studies on contemporary history after the 1960s. Of the twenty-six special editions that were published, nine (34.6%) dealt with the Japanese colonial era. Once the papers, which dealt in part with the Japanese colonial era, are factored in, this total increases to fifteen papers (57.7%).²⁹ The third

28. Examples include: "The Contradictions of Korean Capitalism Exposed in Its Appeal to the IMF in 1998" (vol. 43); "Globalization, Neoliberalism, and the Roles of Nation-State in 2000" (vol. 52); "The September 17 Japan-North Korea Summit and the History of North Korea-Japan Relations in 2002" (vol. 61); "The 50-year Anniversary of the Armistice Agreement, Instable Peace in 2003" (vol. 63); "The Crisis of University Education, Search for Alternatives in 2004" (vol. 67); and "The Power of Samsung, the Shadow of Samsung in 2005" (vol. 72).

29. *Nonjaeng-euro bon hanguk sahoe 100 nyeon* (Taking a Look at the Last 100 Years of Korean Society through Major Controversies) (Seoul: Yeoksa Bipyeongsa, 2000), which was compiled and published by the editorial committee of *Yeoksa bipyeong*

point is the emergence of new research subjects. Interest in various fields that did not draw much attention in the past, including intellectual history, cultural history, local history, regional history, and the history of minority groups, has increased of late.³⁰ These three characteristics are not only also evident in *Sahoe-wa yeoksa*, but have become even more pronounced over the last few years especially regarding the third point.³¹

Based on these analyses, we can conclude that *Sahoe-wa yeoksa* and *Yeoksa munje yeongu* underwent a similar change in their problem awareness from the late-1990s onwards. This is evidenced by the diversification of research subjects along with the emergence of a new generation of researchers who studied the Japanese colonial era. As far as research subjects and methodologies are concerned, there was a marked move away from hard history and towards soft history. From a theoretical standpoint, a trend towards pursuing an “other” history to counter the standard national history began to emerge. The academic questions raised by these trends have paved the way for an academically profound debate that goes well beyond the scope of modern and contemporary Korean history. Let us summarize the implications of this debate based on the above-mentioned three points.

The first is the debate regarding colonial modernity and colonial

in celebration of the journal’s fiftieth publication, reveals that twenty of the fifty-six themes addressed therein concern the opening ports of the Japanese colonial era, twenty one examine the period spanning from liberation to the 1960s, and fifteen look at the 1970s onwards. The number of debates on the period after liberation was more than two-fold greater than those that concerned the period(s) that preceded it. Thus, up until the mid-1990s, the Institute for Korean Historical Studies can be said to have focused more on post-liberation issues than pre-liberation ones.

30. Examples include: “The Social History of Reading during the 1920s-1930s” (vol. 7) in 2001; “The Role of ‘Region’ and ‘Space’ in Modern and Contemporary Korean History” (vol. 17) in 2007; “The ‘Reconstruction Era’ and the Response of Colonial Joseon’s Intellectuals” (vol. 21) in 2009; and “Minority Groups in Modern and Contemporary Korean History” (vol. 22) in 2009.

31. Among the thirteen special editions of *Sahoe-wa yeoksa* published since 2005, six (approximately 50%) have dealt exclusively with the Japanese colonial era. This ratio is further increased when we include the issues that partly dealt with the Japanese colonial era.

modernization. The dominant position on colonial modernity until the mid-1990s was in proving the impossibility of the notion of a logical and historical coexistence of colonization and modernization that could be traced back to the internal development theory of the 1970s. The Korean Social History Association's interest in the Japanese colonial era remained steady from its founding, with the majority of this attention focused on proving colonial exploitation. Meanwhile, during its early stage, the Institute for Korean Historical Studies' interest in the Japanese colonial era was motivated by the issue surrounding the negative legacies of the colony after liberation. As long as the researchers approached modernity as a teleological theory, there was no room for the theory of colonial modernization. In this regard, this has now become one of the most hotly debated issues in the humanities and social sciences in Korea.

The epistemological transition that took place with regard to the issue of "colonial modernization" started with the tacit and explicit recognition of multiple notions of modernity by younger researchers. This led to an acceptance of diverse conceptions of modernity in the 1990s.³² The theory of colonial modernization, which was developed by several economic historians and Korean scholars who studied overseas, emerged from this period as one of the pressing issues in the study of modern and contemporary Korean history (H. Cho 2003; Kong and Jung 2006). The theory triggered interdisciplinary debates by fields such as economics, political science, and social history, as well as between the domestic and overseas branches of Korean studies, thus helping expand the sphere of Korean studies. It also brought to the forefront fundamental research issues related to the continuation of Korean history in the twentieth century, such as the relationship between modernization under the Japanese colonial era and the compressed form of modernization under the Park Chung-hee regime, and the relationship between colonial and divided state structures.

The second point is the debate over the subjects and methodologies introduced and employed within the study of history. For exam-

32. Some of the research that signaled this change includes Kim and Jung (1997).

ple, the New Historicism developed in Western academia was first discussed by scholars of social history and Western history in the early 1980s and began to be applied to the study of Korean history during the mid-1990s.³³ In addition, an increasing number of young scholars, who distanced themselves from the dogma of the colonial exploitation theory, began to examine cultural and historical phenomena related to colonial modernization, e.g. the “modern boy and modern girl” of the 1920s-1930s. Such innovative topics and methodologies remained in wide usage for more than ten years in Korean academia.³⁴

On the surface, this change in study trends, which can be characterized as the transition from macro- to micro-history and from official to unofficial history, was very similar to that which took place within Western academia.³⁵ As the collapse of real socialism became increasingly evident, this change was related to the explosive popularity of post-isms such as postmodernism and cultural theories in the Korean humanities and social sciences from the 1990s onwards. From this period on, the locus of debate moved from Marxism to the French philosophies such as those of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jean Baudrillard. Terms were also altered, with words such as “capitalism,” “social class,” “labor,” and “state” abandoned in favor of postmodern ones such as “body,” “desire,” “culture,” “knowledge,” “power,” and “discourse” (K. Yoon 2000, 157).

However, the significance of the study trend changes in Korean

33. One of the books that best introduce the new trends in the study of history in the West after the introduction of social history, such as daily life throughout history, the history of the mind and nature, the history of culture, and the transition to language, is Ahn (1998). For works introducing this trend in the Korean Social History Association, please refer to Y. Kim (1991) and B. Kim (1997, 293-318).

34. For more on this matter, please refer to B. Kim (2004, 125).

35. Chae Ou-Byung has stressed that the change in study trends that has taken place in the field of historical sociology in the United States from the 1990s can be characterized by three points: fragmentation of themes, transition of viewpoints from macro to micro, and methodological and epistemological diversification. Chae has argued that domestic study trends also originated from the flexible accumulation of neoliberal notions from the 1980s onwards, and the emergence of postmodern emotions occasioned by neoliberalism within the context of global history (Chae 2010, 262-266).

studies cannot be found solely in the import and translation of advanced theories by foreign academics. The complexity of the interactions can only be exposed when the characteristics of those actors who selectively introduced the advanced theories, and the detailed contexts of their research questions are also factored in. To this end, the generational shift that has taken place in terms of the dominant researcher group must be identified as an important factor. The change in the study trends of the Korean Social History Association and the Institute for Korean Historical Studies from the mid-1990s onwards was closely related to the fact that the generation that had carried out studies in the 1970s was replaced by those who conducted their studies in the 1980s. While the former generation was one that lived through the Yushin dictatorship of the late 1970s and the Gwangju Uprising of 1980, the latter experienced the democratization of the late 1980s and the consumption society of the 1990s. This new generation of researchers was influenced by the experience of capitalistic abundance in the aftermath of democratization, the discovery of individual values, and the weakening of the intellectual authority of academia as a result of the advent of information technology (IT) and World Wide Web.

The introduction of new research subjects and methodologies in the study of modern and contemporary Korean history has also been closely related to projects undertaken by intellectuals after democracy was gained, such as “Restoring Correct History” and “Review of Past History.” Examples include the issue of comfort women during the Japanese colonial era and the April 3 Incident in Jeju, both of which had been swept under the rug for decades under the Cold War era and divided state structure as well as under the patriarchal and nationalist government. The study of oral history and memory, which borrowed theories and methodologies from feminism, postcolonialism, and subaltern studies, was combined with radical attempts to reorganize history from below. This in turn resulted in new studies on the subjects of colonization, violence, division, war, and locality in the fields of woman’s history, war history, and local history. To this end, the new methodology in the study of history can be understood as a last-resort

effort to discern the historical truth about historically marginalized groups, rather than as an application of imported methodologies.³⁶

Third, and closely related to the above two elements, is the movement away from the dogma of dominant nationalist history and the movement towards examining “other” history. A look at the national discourses of modern Korea from the standpoint of people, nation, and racial ethnicity reveals that Korean history has functioned as the core logic system used to strengthen national identity (M. Park 2008, 245-262). Nationalism, which was regarded as the core notion within discourse on Korean history by all camps from the 1960s to the 1980s, experienced a rapid alteration prior to and after 1990. Nationalism in the 1990s began to be regarded as a notion that carried an inherent risk of descending into anachronistic nationalism rather than as progressive thought that could attract intellectuals and students (K. Yoon 2000, 230-234).

The topography of academic discourse on the “other” history, which stretches beyond the imagination of national history, can be divided into macro- and micro-level elements. While macro-elements problematize the ways in which the comparative history approach is rooted in the global and East Asian systems, micro-elements bring attention to studies on social groups that have been excluded from interpretation unlike privileged actors of national history. From a theoretical standpoint, the macro-elements deal with units of analysis while the micro-elements trace particular agents of history. An examination of the research trends of the Korean Social History Association and the Institute for Korean Historical Studies yields many examples. More specifically, various studies concerned with the units of analysis were published in the special editions of *Yeoksa munje yeongu*: “The Notions of ‘Local’ and ‘Space’ in Korean Modern and Contemporary History” (vol. 17) in 2007; “Korean Contemporary History and Local Provinces” (vol. 18) in 2007; and “The Modernity of the Colony and Changes in Local Society” (vol. 21) in 2009. Studies related to the main actors of history include: “The Reality and Future

36. Refer to S. Kim (1998) and T. Yoon (2010).

Outlook of the National Community—The Social History of Division, Diaspora, and Stagnation” presented during the regular academic conference organized by the Korean Social History Association in 2009; and “A New Approach in the Study of Labor History in Korea” that appeared in the special edition of *Sahoe-wa yeoksa* in 2010 (vol. 85), which, through subaltern studies, attempted to develop new historical actors by distancing itself from the study of traditional labor history; “Minority groups in Korean Modern and Contemporary History” published in the special edition of *Yeoksa munje yeongu* in 2009 (vol. 22); and “People on the Boundary: Toward a New People’s History,” which appeared in a special edition of 2010 (vol. 23).

National history, regarded as a sacrosanct sphere of Korean history up until the 1980s, experienced a significant decline beginning the late-1990s on due to trends of globalization. Works searching for alternatives seek to rewrite and redefine history on two levels: unit of analysis and principal actors. Such an undertaking is required in order to fundamentally develop historical subjects such as social strata, gender, and generations that go beyond the nation. It is also clear that answers cannot be found when the scope is limited to Korea and the Korean peninsula. In this regard, the growing interest in East Asian history as a whole can be regarded as important.³⁷ However, to bring about a new phase in international joint research, continuous effort must be made to overcome the inherent limitations and problems associated with the Confucian society theory, which characterizes East Asia based on stereotypes of traditional Confucian culture. In addition, the study of hegemony in East Asia that has focused on institutional powers must also be overcome.

37. Recent activities on the part of the Korean Social History Association along with this denouement include: “Changes in Everyday Life during the 100 Years of Korean Modern and Contemporary History: With a Special Focus on Everyday Life and Culture in Korea and Japan over the Past Century” presented during the 2010 International Academic Conference. Meanwhile, recent pertinent activities of the Institute for Korean Historical Studies include: “Writings about the Decentralization of East Asian History” which appeared in a special edition of *Yeoksa bipyeong* in 2007 (vol. 79); and “The Frontier in East Asia” that was featured in a special edition of *Yeoksa bipyeong* published in 2008 (vol. 85).

The Task of Korean Studies in the Twenty-First Century and Its Future

Works tracing the trends in modern and contemporary Korean history based on discourse promoted by the likes of the Korean Social History Association and the Institute for Korean Historical Studies must inevitably trace the multiple causes and effects amongst various variables and in an incomplete manner at best. Because of space limitations, this study has focused on two journals. A more extensive study in the field of sociology of knowledge remains necessary, and would include an expansion of methodology and data, e.g. interviews with editors and readers, that would yield a comprehensive understanding of the reaction to these journals by both academia and popular media. In this sense, this study can be regarded as a preliminary outline for a future full-scale study conducted in a more inclusive, dimensional, and sophisticated manner.

The 1980s marked a point in time when “modernity” first emerged as a subject of academic study. As Korean history had previously been focused on a national history approach designed to overcome the colonial view of history, the interest in modernity and reflections on the academic characteristics of modern history were inevitably delayed. The starting point for those researchers in the field of social history who adopted the Annales School’s long-term perspective of history as their own, as well as those *minjung* historians who adopted the Marxist notion of historical materialism as their ideological model, differed greatly from one another from both an academic and political standpoint. While the Institute for Korean Historical Studies focused on the main actors and viewpoints of history based on the notion of *minjung*, the Korean Social History Association concentrated on elements of social theory such as institutions and structures.

The first epistemological transition emerged during the period in which modernity was introduced as a new area of interest in Korean studies. However, at the time the term was solely perceived in an abstract sense against the backdrop of a non-contextual consciousness resulting from the blind acceptance of foreign ideas and a dearth

of indigenous, first-hand empirical studies. As a result, despite their best efforts to reorganize national history based on the *minjung* concept and to establish an indigenous structural change based on a thorough search for evidence, the scholars of the day inevitably encountered a profound distance between “fact” and “theory” as they toiled away in the poor intellectual soil that made their academic goals unattainable. Consequently, the group-level trials and errors that emerged during the first epistemological transition in the study of modern and contemporary Korean history in the 1980s should be perceived as an inevitable historical process that led to a growing awareness of the academic errors passed down by the previous generation.

The second epistemological transition occurred amidst a shift away from the notions of modernity and the nation, resulting from the global historical trends of the post-Cold War, postmodern era, and increasing globalization. Suddenly, “modernity” began to be perceived by young researchers in the field of Korean studies as a new research subject to explore the unique historical path that formed contemporary Korean society. An analysis of the trends in academic discourse made it possible to discover an original theory in Korean studies through the convergence of the social sciences and history. It is particularly significant that these two groups, whose theoretical and practical objectives differed greatly, began sharing ideas through a common language.

Nevertheless, much is left unfinished. The numerous debates that have been waged since the 1980s regarding the social changes within modern and contemporary Korean society are akin to the burden of Sisyphus in that they are necessary in order to narrow down the epistemological gap between imported discourses and reality. As such, the move towards indigenization by sociology scholars and the pursuit of *minjung* history by historians during the 1980s originates from the interdisciplinary gap between nomothetic and idiographic fields of study. One should understand the second epistemological transition as a process in which, despite coming from different starting points, both camps have come to share a common mindset in the contemporary era.

Then, what future tasks await the field of Korean studies in the twenty-first century in an era when the social sciences and history have developed alongside each other? To begin with, Korea's unique experiences must be theorized in universal terms to produce nomothetic studies. The possibility of actualizing the task referred to as the giving of a unique theoretical form to the field of Korean studies was examined herein by analyzing the two stages of epistemological transition. If the main task of Korean studies in the 1980s was to evade the intellectual trap of modernization, then the key task in the twenty-first century is that of finding ways to reorganize the experiences of "national history" into the universal terms of "human history" and "global history." While the former was a relatively passive and defensive endeavor, the latter should be a more active and aggressive undertaking.

The achievement of this ambitious task that is called the transformation of Korean studies in the twenty-first century will require the resolution of the following three pressing issues. First, to replace the institutionalized academic system that harkens to the nineteenth century, means must be found to create a new system for Korean studies, a field that overlaps the academic boundaries between the social sciences and history. Second, measures must be taken to upgrade the poor status of Korean studies vis-à-vis Chinese and Japanese studies abroad and to activate the field of East Asian regional studies, whose scope extends beyond national borders. Third, ways must be found to establish a new Korean studies paradigm in the postcolonial and post-Cold War era that is based on the historical experiences of colonization, the Korean War, and the division of the two Koreas, as well as a profound introspection on the coloniality of academia itself. The fate of Korean studies in the twenty-first century depends on whether we can find answers to these questions.

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