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How can we understand women's activities in the history of Korean science and technology? How can we reconceptualize technology to examine the practical activities of women within its scope? *Science, Technology, and Women in Korea* is an attempt to answer these questions through an examination of women's technological practices from Joseon to the Japanese colonial period.

To discover women's significance in the development of Korean science and technology, the authors provide an overview of women's technological practice. Despite a fair number of studies of the topic, none match the chronological sweep of this volume. In addition, previous work has failed to analyze the influence of female practices on contemporary science, technology, and medicine. This book improves our understanding of women's role in the development of science and technology.

While the research on the technological practice of Korean women is still rudimentary, this book presents and examines valuable historical examples of women's technological practices. The authors interpret women's labor in everyday life within the realm of technology and recognize the significance of their technological knowledge and practice. They focus on the activities of ordinary women rather than experts, a point of view that has been raised in recent discourses on science and technology.

In *A People's History of Science* (2005), Clifford D. Connor argues that advances in science and technology have been based more on the day-to-day activities of laypersons rather than the scientists. He demonstrated that scientific achievements have been, in fact, reliant on the empirical knowledge and technical skills of artisans, farmers, sailors, and midwives, acquired through years of training and experience. This is the basis of his "people's history" approach. Similarly, *Science and Technology and Women in Korea* contributes to our understanding of the history of science and technology in Korea by focusing on the activities of women, which have traditionally been marginalized in historical writing.

This book also sheds light on the ways in which women's activities contributed to

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the dissemination and development of *hangul* as an artifact. The combination of the writing system and the act of writing in *hangul* have been instrumental in women's ability to share or improve upon their knowledge. This approach is consistent with the academic trend that highlights Joseon-era female records in *hangul*. However, the authors go one step further. They recognize *hangul* as a subject of technical engineering as well as a human-made artifact, and demonstrate how women, as its main users, substantially contributed to its development and dissemination. Joseon women contributed to advancing *hangul* literary styles and spreading the writing practices through their literary activities and the composition of letters, poems, and novels. In particular, *hangul* was superior to Chinese characters for transcribing the subtle details of the Korean colloquial language, making it a better vehicle for the conveyance of women's technical knowledge. For instance, when describing cutting food with a kitchen knife, words that are translated in Chinese characters as "*jeol*" 切 (cut) and "*bi*" 批 (slice) can be recorded in everyday Korean expressions as "*ssulda* (썰다)" and "*jeomida* (저미다)" when using *hangul*. As such, Korean women established and advanced the *hangul* writing system and patterns through its use. Furthermore, the use of *hangul* by women in the royal palaces—the queen, princesses, concubines, and court maids—contributed to the creation and development of a distinctive *hangul* calligraphic style known as "*gungche* (궁체)" 宮體 (court script). By treating *hangul* as an artifact and showing that women were its most frequent users, the authors recognize the significance of *hangul* in the history of Korean technology.

Nonetheless, the book has several shortcomings. The most significant is that the evaluation of women's technological practice, the theme of the book, is understated. Although the authors illustrate the ways in which women's technological practices were transmitted, they do not explain how these practices could be interpreted across time and discipline. This may be attributed to the interdisciplinary collaboration of the contributors. However, had the editors of the volume categorized female technological practice in the Joseon and Japanese colonial periods and structured the narratives by period or field, our understanding of the significance of women's technological practice would have been more thorough.

Indeed, the authors mention the obstacles they encountered in compiling this book. Besides the difficulty of setting up an overarching concept of technology for the Joseon and the Japanese colonial periods, the lack of sources was problematic. Despite such setbacks, structuring the book in such a way as to guide the readers toward the author's argument would have been helpful.

The book is comprised of two sections: the Joseon and Japanese colonial periods. Each section contains a simplistic narrative of women's technological practice and of women's labor. One could also consider setting up several major concepts that allow the readers to form an understanding of the characteristics and transformations of female technological practice and rearrange the details either thematically or chronologically.

For example, the context could be framed in terms of “transmission,” “modification,” and “development” and presented by actual practice of women in the Joseon and the Japanese colonial periods. The division of chapters on the Joseon period according to agricultural participation, clothing habits, dietary habits, and housing may limit our view of women’s contribution to technological practice of their time. However, the new framework for understanding women’s technological practice will enable the readers to reach a more proactive evaluation of their contributions. Activities such as rice transplantation, dry-field farming, and textile production, may serve well as examples in the “transmission” section; food recipes, medicine, and tailoring in the “modification” section; and professional fields practiced in the royal court and *hangul* writing in the “development” section. This structure is also applicable to the post-Joseon period. Since the development of clothing and dietary habits during this period was largely coupled with extrinsic factors such as the emergence of machinery, expansive use of *hangul* texts, and introduction of new food ingredients, these themes could be discussed in the “modification” or “development” sections.

Furthermore, the Japanese colonial period may have less information on technological transmission than the Joseon period. However, this could be reinterpreted as the expansion and growth of women’s technological practice. The authors allocate medicine to the end of each section because medicine was “a specialized field of expertise, distinctive from other areas in terms of the way and the scale of female participation.” However, reclassifying technological practice into several categories could have allowed for a smoother narrative on medicine. Such a narrative structure could have accentuated women’s technological practice and clarified their contributions to the transformation of Korean science and technology.

The authors also admit the difficulty in examining women’s activities in both eras under the same criteria since science and technology were more strongly affected by extrinsic factors in the modern period than in the premodern era. Just as people tend to discuss continuity and discontinuity in relation to premodernity and modernity, the authors link continuity-discontinuity and expansion-reduction to their examination of technological practices in the modern transitional period. Although premodern and modern technological practices cannot be classified under the same criteria, unifying the perspective would have enhanced the structural cohesion of the contents.

In their treatment of clothing and dietary habits in the modern transitional period, the authors describe the transformation or alteration of women’s technological practice under Japanese imperialism. Yet, the ways in which the sociopolitical environment relates to women’s technological practice or women’s system of thoughts at the time is not clearly explained. Social and psychological factors such as fashion and envy may have also affected the attitudes of women at that time. For example, women who could afford to receive formal education wore school uniforms, and thus the shape of school uniforms gradually changed, or women wanted to set up various

diets as they encountered food recipes from foreign countries or other regions. If the explanation is made on a single stem that penetrates the times and fields of how these factors are in contact with women's practice of technology, it will enrich the understanding of women's technical knowledge and practice.

There is a wealth of records and documents that support the narratives of women's medical activities and roles during the modern transitional period. As a result, the coverage of this period was richer on one hand, but on the other hand may create an illusion that women's medical activities or experiences dramatically increased over the premodern era. Chapter 4 shows a sharp increase in the number of nurses and midwives since the establishment of the licensing system for these professions. However, the increase in nursing staff may be a product of the Government General of Joseon's encouragement of this activity and expansion of official educational institutions. In interpreting this image, besides the increase in women's nursing and midwife activities, a description of how their activities affected the acceptance of Western medicine in Joseon society or Joseon at that time is needed. Only then can we fully understand the meaning of the acceptance and practice of Western medicine and modern technical knowledge of women at that time.

Fernand Braudel's *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalism, 15e-18e siècle* (1979) examined everyday life to understand the emergence of modern capitalism. Such a view is also applicable in discussing the history of science and technology. The development of science and technology is not only a series of heroic achievements such as the formulation of new theories or the creation of useful artifacts. Rather, it is the direct or indirect product of practices by countless men and women who have been neglected in conventional histories. *Science, Technology and Women in Korea* introduces its readers to a new way of examining the history of Korean science and technology by focusing on women's practice. I hope to see more work along this line in the history of Korean science and technology.