

BOOK REVIEW

Kim Geun Bae, Lee Eunkyong, Sun You-Jeong 김근배 이은경 선유정, *The Birth of Scientists in the Republic of Korea: Biographies in Korean Science and Technology*, vol. *Natural Sciences* 대한민국 과학자의 탄생: 한국 과학기술 인물 열전 — 자연과학 편 (Seoul: Serobooks, 2024), 752 pp.

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Who were the early scientists of modern Korea? How did they become scientists? What activities did they perform, and what contributions did they make as scientists in Korea? Featuring thirty ethnic Korean scientists born before 1945, this book introduces compelling life stories of early Korean scientists, each of whom lived a border-crossing life. As colonial subjects, they navigated multiple languages and countries to survive and seize opportunities; as citizens of a nascent nation, they took on various responsibilities as institutional builders, educators, and researchers. Collectively, this book shows that the rise of science in Korea was shaped by the life trajectories of these individuals.

The book spans over 700 pages, yet each chapter stands alone as a concise biography, allowing readers to selectively explore the stories of scientists that interest them most. Each chapter begins with a photo and basic information, including the scientist's name in Korean, Chinese characters, and English, as well as their educational and professional backgrounds. The main text opens with a summary of their notable achievements and significance. This is followed by a narrative that unfolds their life story, starting with family origins and early education. While footnotes are absent from the main text, each chapter concludes with a detailed reference section. The content draws from a broad range of primary and secondary sources, including academic writings, interviews, and articles from newspapers and magazines, reflecting more than 15 years of archival research and collection. Visual images and excerpts from newspapers written in old Korean make the book even more engaging to read. The volume ends with a timeline that chronicles key events in Korean history and significant scientific accomplishments by individuals and institutions relevant to the thirty stories presented. While a comprehensive analysis by the authors on the emergence of modern Korean scientists at the end would have enhanced the reader's

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overall understanding, the book intentionally leaves this question open, inviting readers to appreciate the diverse life stories as they are.

The book reveals how the ups and downs of the protagonists' life journeys were entangled with the history of modern Korea by highlighting not only their academic accomplishments but also various aspects of their personal lives. The authors evoke a range of emotions in readers as they trace the paths of these scientists. For example, biologist Sam Soon Kim (김삼순), the only female scientist introduced in this book, "fought against double discrimination as both a colonial subject and a woman" (393). Many scientists experienced tragic family separations due to the division of South and North Korea in 1948, with ornithologist Hong-Koo Won's (원홍구) story being particularly dramatic. After the separation, Won, who remained in North Korea, indirectly reconnected with his son—also an ornithologist in South Korea—when he discovered an aluminum band on a Daurian starling in Pyongyang that his son had placed in the south (97-98). During the authoritarian regime, a few scientists, such as Ki Chul Choi (최기철), used their status as professors to speak out against electoral fraud (433-434). In other instances, their status was mobilized, as in the case of astronomer David Wonchul Lee/Won Chul Lee (이원철) and mathematician Yun-Shick Choi/Yoon Sik Choi (최윤식), whose names were used to justify manipulating the quorum during the second constitutional amendment in 1954 (140, 177). Altogether, these narratives illustrate how each scientist's unique life story was shaped within the broader context of modern Korean history.

One of the most meaningful contributions to the history of science in Korea is the recognition of Korean diaspora scientists. Such cases include Joseph Dal Park (박달조), a second-generation immigrant chemist born in Honolulu, Hawaii, and Rimhak Ree (리림학), a former mathematics professor at Seoul National University, who maintained his identity as someone originating from "pre-independent Joseon" after the South Korean Consulate in San Francisco stripped him of his South Korean nationality in the 1950s when he desired to continue his research in North America upon earning his Ph.D. in Canada (286, 545, 554-555). These cases are crucial because they challenge the common perception that Korean scientists are typically born in Korea, study and work abroad temporarily, and then return home to contribute to their country. Their stories stand apart from the widely known case of Taikei Ri/Taikyue Ree (이태규), also featured in this book, who was born and raised in Korea, trained and worked in Japan and the US as a chemist—notably holding a professorship at the University of Utah for 25 years—before eventually returning to Korea. Even during his time at Utah, Taikyue Ree maintained strong connections with Korea by advising Korean students and representing Korea in an international conference (224-225). In contrast, the experiences of Joseph Dal Park and Rimhak Ree highlight a different dimension of the Korean diaspora, characterized by a looser connection to the peninsula throughout their professional lives. Their stories open up new possibilities for future research on personal identity, migration, and transnational dynamics in the history of science in Korea.

Although limited, the discussion of scientific practices outside of Seoul is a valuable addition to this book. While it cannot be denied that major scientific activities and organizations were concentrated in the capital and its surrounding areas, the book brings to light several critical events in other regions. For instance, Chung-Ki Pak's (박정기) contribution to the establishment of the Department of Mathematics at Kyungpook National University in Daegu and its development into "the center of mathematics in Korea" is noteworthy (453). Likewise, the story of Ryang-ha Kimm/Riang-Ha Kimm (김량하), known for his work on Vitamin E as a chemist, includes his appointment as the president of Pusan Fisheries College and his early termination due to his opposition to the establishment of Pusan National University (198-200). While resistance to the formation of Seoul National University is well-known, shedding light on the parallel event in Busan during the same period is especially significant.

Expectations are high for the forthcoming volumes in this series. The authors are planning follow-up volumes on themes such as engineering, policy and culture, medicine, agriculture, and North Korea. This book and the subsequent series are suitable not only for historians of modern science in Korea but also for general readers and undergraduate teaching. Readers may occasionally find themselves lost in the strings of names, but for the most part, this book is an easy read. For scholars working on Korea, this book offers a wealth of research topics that anticipate further in-depth analyses. For historians studying the Japanese empire, it provides critical insights into the scientific practices of colonial subjects and their transition into post-1945 nation-building efforts. It will also appeal to historians of science more broadly, particularly those interested in institutional formation, diasporas, colonialism, interpersonal networks, or education, who wish to expand their scope.