

To Live to Work: Factory Women in Colonial Korea 1910-1945. By Janice C. H. Kim. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008. 272 pp., \$55, ISBN 978-0804759090 (hardcover).

Sun Jae Won

The phenomenon of industrialization in colonial Korea, one of the high economic growth countries following the Second World War, has recently garnered much attention from scholars on a quest to find an economic growth model that can be implemented across developing countries. Spurring on such scholars is the belief that developing countries can easily catch up to Korea, which itself caught up with developed countries through importing not only technology but capital, unlike Japan which realized high economic growth exclusively through the import of technology. From this perspective, an examination of the cultural and emotional background of women workers, who contributed to the economic growth through their endurance throughout the colonial period and after WWII, is worthy of a meticulous examination.

In this book, Janice Kim tries consistently to describe the Korean women workers during the colonial period as the first generation of modern female youths who were not a social cost of modernization and had no strong class-consciousness. She depicts Korean women wageworkers as growing up as an individual as well as maintaining connections with their family: they were not only sending their earnings to their family but also trying to realize their own dreams, all the while enduring wretched working conditions. Regarding views of socialism and nationalism related to perceptions surrounding women workers in colonial Korea, she criticizes scholars who did not realize class as an occurrence relative to time, space, and experience.

In chapter one, “Locating Korean Factory Women in Time and Place,” Kim initially outlines the facts of industrialization, especially in the heavy industries in colonial Korea that advanced with increasing rapidity from 1930 to 1945. However, she criticized these views, assuming that modernization was a linear progression without a suitable evaluation of the influence on women workers in the light industry of the 1920s, such as spinning and weaving, silk reeling, and rice and food processing. She argued the analysis of women wageworkers in colonial Korea should have economic and cultural perspectives in order to reveal the diversity and specificity of Korean modern history. Also, she maintains that industrialization in colonial Korea provided women workers with a chance to realize their own personal

growth. During this growth, they came to possess a powerful survival technique through adaptability not servility.

In chapter two, “Modernization and the Rise of Women’s Wage Work,” Kim criticizes the linier perspective of James Scott, whose analysis maintains that peasants sought “safety first” then profit, and Samuel Popkin, whose examination noted that peasants were “forward-looking” planners rather than those who solely embrace subsistence-based lifestyles. The reason behind her critique being that Scott and Popkin mainly analyzed the economy rather than culture, which is the realm where the diversity of the peasant lifestyle can be uncovered. Later on, she argues the rise of women wageworkers in colonial Korea indicated that the majority of rural families in early twentieth-century Korea not only maintained stability but took risks in their everyday ventures. In addition, she stresses even if women in colonial Korea headed for the factories out of parental pressure and remitted their earnings to their parents, they were simultaneously planning for their future welfare.

In chapter three, she discusses women workers in everyday lives and labors. In the beginning, Kim recognized the macro political and economic conditions that confined women workers’ lives in colonial Korea. However, she also emphasized that interpersonal networks such as those formed on the shop floor and within the dormitories determined women workers’ conditions of recruitment, contracts and wages, work inside the factory, life inside the dormitories, night work, and misfortunes. After posing these arguments, she raised the question of why they endured such Herculean labor and poor living conditions at work and in their everyday lives. She posits that women workers in colonial Korea dreamt of the realization of ambitions, while gleaning pride from supporting their families, and it kept them going despite the immense hardships.

In chapter four, “Contests of Power and Workers’ Modes of Association,” Kim indicates that nationalists, socialists, and feminists in academia use the image of women workers in colonial Korea to underscore the adversities of Japanese rule and wrote the labor history in colonial Korea within the context of a social revolution. Additionally, she mentions they do not have interest in what women workers in colonial Korea did prior to employment at the factories or their accomplishments after they left the mills, as they focus their attention solely on whether Korean women workers had revolutionary potential. She, on the other hand, emphasizes women workers’ contests of power during the colonial period were for neither the working class nor the nation.

In chapter five, “The Pacific War and the Life Courses of Working Women,”

Kim points out that the Pacific War, ironically, provided not only crisis but also opportunity to women workers in colonial Korea. During the Pacific War mobilization, Japanese officials and Korean intermediaries aggressively implemented policies and programs for extended human resources: turning women in colonial Korea into workers in heavy and light industries. As a result, the number of women workers increased throughout the colonial era and swelled again during the Pacific War. After pointing to this, she accentuates that women Korean workers also bolstered self-confidence and overcame gender and class obstacles during the Pacific War, although they endured injustices under the colonial rule.

The most important contribution of this book is its success in revealing the everyday lives and labor of first-generation Korean women workers who dreamt of self-reliance in the colonial period and after the Second World War, even if they were persistently restricted by their families in their attempts to depart. Therefore, I would suggest this book to not only historians who are interested in the real nature of the rest of the world's colonial history but also scholars delving into the preconditions of economic growth in Korea. In addition, if one carries the image of feminists having a rigid perspective on modern young women, this book will remove that misunderstanding. In addition, we must acknowledge that these new facts were revealed through the extremely difficult interview methodology.

I would like to propose two things for future endeavors. First, related to critiques of scholars Kim mentioned, I do not believe that so-called socialists and nationalists denied the influences of culture to the formation of women's consciousness as wageworkers during modernization, although they did focus on the formation of men's consciousness as workers. For example, I do not read James Scott as having denied the influences of culture on Malaysian women workers' consciousness during modernization. Second, for making inclusive images in terms of Korean modern history, Kim would be better off applying the view concerning Korean women workers in the colonial period onto male workers who also had dreams of self-reliance while maintaining strong relationships with their families.

Sun Jae Won
Department of Japanese Studies, Pusan National University