

# The History of the Formation of *Silhak* in Modern Korea: A Preliminary Research

Kwan Bum NOH

This article examines the historical trajectory of the construction of historical knowledge about Korean *silhak*. It focuses on the formation of modern notions of *silhak* and the invention of modern knowledge about *silhak* scholars. The following four points need to be taken into account in considering the formation of *silhak* in modern Korea. First, the relationship between the Way and the Instrument in traditional Confucian scholarship. Second, institution and civilization, as expressed in the phrases of *gyeongse chiyong* (administration and practical usage) and *iyong husaeng* (profitable usage benefiting the people). Third, growing interest in the historical importance of Jeong Yakyong's scholarship. Fourth, consistent interest in the value of practicality (*sil*). This article concludes by identifying avenues for further advances in the study of the history of Korean *silhak*, to expand our understanding of the interrelationship between the modern consciousness of *silhak* and the historical knowledge of *silhak* scholars.

**Keywords:** *silhak*, consciousness of *silhak*, knowledge of *silhak* scholars, Yu Hyeong-weon, Pak Jiweon, Jeong Yakyong

## Introduction

This article examines the trajectory of the formation of *silhak* in Korean history, especially how the historical knowledge of *silhak* from the late Joseon period was reconstituted in the modern period. There was a time when research on late Joseon *silhak*, marking the culmination of the theory of the inception of modern thought (Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe, 1975), was at the center of academic

---

Kwan Bum Noh ([kunja17@smu.ac.kr](mailto:kunja17@smu.ac.kr)) is an associate professor at the Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies, Seoul National University. This work was translated by Sungoh Yoon of the Institute for East Asian Studies at Sogang University and Sangjae Lee of the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University

*Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 36, no. 1 (June 2023): 277–310.

© 2023 Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies