

Kim Jeong-ho yeongu [A study of Kim Jeong-ho] by Lee Sang-tae.
Gyeongin Munhwasa, 2021. 304 pp.

Kim Jeong-ho is among the best-known cartographers of late Joseon Korea. Yet he is also difficult to study with historical precision. His name is closely tied to *Daedong yeojido* [Territorial map of the Great East], the large woodblock-printed map of Korea first produced in 1861 and revised in 1864. General introductions in English often stress the map's impressive features: its twenty-two foldable sections, woodblock printing, dense place-name information, and careful representations of mountains, rivers, roads, settlements, and administrative sites. These features are important, but they can also lead readers to see Kim mainly as the maker of a single famous map. Lee Sang-tae, a long-time scholar of premodern Korean maps, offers a fuller and more historically grounded account in *Kim Jeong-ho yeongu*. Since its publication, the book has attracted sustained attention in Korean scholarship and was selected by the National Academy of Sciences, Republic of Korea, as one of its Outstanding Academic Books of 2022. It has, however, received far less attention in English-language scholarship.

The book begins with a simple but important question. Did Kim really make *Daedong yeojido* by traveling throughout the entire country and surveying it himself? Lee's answer is clear. Kim's work should not be understood as the product of a solitary traveler or field surveyor. It was based on the sustained use of earlier maps, geographical writings, local information, and repeated comparison and correction. This is the central point of the book. It does not diminish Kim's achievement, but provides a more plausible account of it. The value of *Daedong yeojido* lies partly in Kim's ability to collect, organize, revise, and combine existing geographical knowledge.

The book has four chapters. Chapter 1 surveys Korean maps before *Daedong yeojido*, from the Three Kingdoms and Goryeo periods through early Joseon. This chapter gives historical depth to Kim's work by showing that he did not stand outside the Korean cartographic tradition, but inherited and reorganized it. Chapter 2 examines Kim's life, reputation, later evaluation, and modern scholarship on him. Direct evidence about Kim's life is limited, and Lee treats this problem carefully. At the same time, he questions several familiar stories about Kim's social status, travels, and death.

Chapter 3 turns from maps to geographical writings. Lee discusses five works associated with Kim: *Dongyeo pyeongo* [Reference notes on Korean geography], two versions of *Dongyeo doji* [Map gazetteer of Korea], *Yeodo biji* [Supplementary records for maps], and *Daedong jiji* [Gazetteer of the Great

East]. Chapter 4 reconstructs the making of *Daedong yeojido* by comparing it with earlier and related maps. These include Jeong Sang-gi's *Dongguk daejido* [Great map of Korea], late Joseon county map collections, *Haedong yeojido* [Map of Korea], *Joseondo* [Map of Joseon], *Cheonggudo* [Map of Cheonggu, a poetic name for Korea], and *Dongyeodo* [Map of Korea].

One of the book's strongest contributions is its treatment of Kim as both a mapmaker and a compiler of geographical texts. This is especially useful for readers outside Korea. English-language accounts of *Daedong yeojido* often stress its visual qualities and technical sophistication. Lee asks how such a map became possible. His answer is that Kim's maps and geographical writings were closely connected. Making a map required more than drawing. It required selecting information, correcting place names, comparing sources, reducing or enlarging earlier maps, and arranging geographical knowledge in a usable form. In this sense, Kim's work belongs not only to the history of cartography but also to the history of geographical compilation.

Lee's discussion of *Cheonggudo* is another strength of the book. In public memory, *Daedong yeojido* usually overshadows Kim's earlier works. Lee argues that *Cheonggudo* was one of the projects to which Kim devoted sustained effort. The book traces several stages from *Cheonggudo* through *Dongyeodo* to the manuscript and woodblock forms of *Daedong yeojido*. This argument helps readers see the 1861 woodblock edition not as a sudden breakthrough, but as the mature result of a longer process. It should therefore be read together with Kim's earlier manuscript maps and geographical writings.

The book also corrects the heroic image of Kim Jeong-ho. Stories about Kim personally walking across the entire peninsula, climbing remote mountains, or being punished by the state for producing an accurate map have long shaped his popular image. Lee does not simply reject these stories; rather, he replaces them with a more plausible historical explanation. Kim worked with available materials, comparing them carefully and revising his work over time. His achievement lay not in escaping inherited knowledge, but in reorganizing it with unusual care and skill.

This point matters beyond the biography of one cartographer. Late Joseon maps, gazetteers, local records, administrative information, routes, and place names often overlapped. Lee's book shows how these forms of knowledge worked together in Kim's case. Kim was not only representing territory visually but also making geographical information easier to compare, use, and transmit. This helps explain why *Daedong yeojido* became such an important work in Korean cartographic history.

The book's limits are related to its intended audience. Lee writes mainly for

Korean specialists in premodern maps. Its strength lies in its engagement with Korean scholarship and close reading of sources. International readers may wish for more explicit comparison with Qing China, Tokugawa Japan, or European cartographic practices. They may also want further discussion of readership, circulation, the material conditions of woodblock printing, and the social uses of printed maps. Some points, especially the precise dating and sequence of certain manuscripts and gazetteers, will also invite further study. These limits do not detract from the book's value. They point instead to ways in which future research can extend Lee's findings.

Overall, *Kim Jeong-ho yeongu* is a Korean-language study that deserves wider attention. Its value extends beyond the details it adds to the life of a famous cartographer. It also changes how readers should understand Kim Jeong-ho. Lee moves the discussion away from a simple story of heroic travel and individual genius. He presents Kim as a careful compiler and reviser who worked across maps and geographical writings. For English-speaking readers, this is the book's main contribution. It places Kim Jeong-ho and *Daedong yeojido* within the broader development of late Joseon geographical knowledge.

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