

Review Article

A 350-Year History of a *Chungin* Family Line Interwoven with Genealogical Records and Oral History*

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The History of the *Chungin* Miryang Pak

A Family of No Prominence: The Descendants of Pak Tökhwa and the Birth of Modern Korea narrates the 350-year history of a family that was *chungin* (“middle people”), a distinct social status group in Korean history. It is the author’s second monograph, and sources on the status system were utilized as extensively as in his first monograph.¹

Chungin, which indicates a social status group occupying special technical positions in the Chosŏn Dynasty (1392–1910), has gained the attention of

* This is a review of Eugene Y. Park, *A Family of No Prominence: The Descendants of Pak Tökhwa and the Birth of Modern Korea* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014). It was originally presented in a discussion at the occasion of Park’s presentation on his work during the Kyujanggak Book Talk (*chöja t’ükkang*) of July 13, 2015. The Book Talks series invites authors of Korean Studies books to Korea to introduce their latest work to the academic community in South Korea.

1. Eugene Y. Park, *Between Dreams and Reality: The Military Examination in Late Chosŏn Korea, 1600–1894* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007). This book greatly revised and expanded the chapters on the late Chosŏn period in his Ph.D. dissertation, “Military Officials in Chosŏn Korea, 1392–1863” (Harvard University, 1999), which analyzed some 32,000 military exam degree holders.

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historians as a research subject. However, there has been difficulty in producing concrete research outcomes. Thus, most studies have been limited to examining either the characteristics of the *chungin* status in comparison to that of aristocrats (*yangban*), commoners, or slaves (*nobi*), or to studying a specific *chungin* family during a given period. One can tell from the title of the book, *A Family of No Prominence*, that the primary reason that studies on *chungin* have not demonstrated much progress can be ascribed to the fact that existing sources are not as varied or rich as those left by royals or aristocrats.

Of course, this does not mean that written documents related to *chungin* are nonexistent. The main individuals studied in this book might not have left as many documents of their own as royals or aristocrats, but they left more clues in written documents than commoners or slaves, who usually left none. Official historical records as well as private family records such as written genealogies (*chokpo*) are also available for reference. Thus, this study can be considered an account of an expedition across the history of a *chungin* family using the broken fragments of remaining sources. Further, this book not only explores the Miryang Pak line of *chungin*, but also ranges extensively over related *chungin* families. In doing so, the book demonstrates the highest achievements in the fields of *chungin* history, family history, and genealogical study that one could reach at the present stage in the study of Korean history.

The main content of *A Family of No Prominence* comprises six chapters, excluding the prologue and epilogue. This only amounts to 137 pages, whereas 99 are set aside for endnotes (45 pages), works cited (28 pages), a list of characters (13 pages), and an index (13 pages). Many notes contain even more fascinating information and challenging arguments than the main part of the book.

Since the author has already presented the contents of his work at the Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies, it will suffice here to sketch a brief outline of the book's chapters:

1. From the Mists of Time
2. Living with Status Ambiguity: Guardsmen, Merchants, and Illegitimate Children
3. As a Middle People: Military Officers, Jurists, and Calligraphers
4. Long Live the Korean Empire: Hopes, Fulfillment, and Frustrations
5. Fortunes that Rose and Fell with Imperial Korea: the Tanyang U In-Laws
6. Vignettes: Colonial Subjects of Imperial Japan

Chapter 1 identifies the Pak line's obscure origin in the period between 1590 and 1700 before the Miryang Pak formed a *chungin* family. The early history of

the subject family of Pak Tökhwa through the first four generations is murky. Also, the families of their wives are evidently untraceable.

Chapter 2 covers the period between 1700 and 1800, during which the Miryang Pak *chungin* family laid the groundwork for upward mobility. This *chungin* family, starting from a family of lower-level army officers, advanced to specialist *chungin* status by the eighteenth century through marriage to families of other lower-level army officers, Han River merchants, and illegitimate children from the aristocracy. In the meantime the Paks became affluent by means of managing royal estates in Kyönggi province and acquiring profitable ramie fields in Ch'ungch'öng province.

Chapter 3 addresses the process by which the social status of the Paks solidified as *chungin* between 1800 and 1880. With its accumulated wealth, the Pak family situated itself as specialist *chungin*, and developed a network through marriage with other *chungin* families holding government technical positions such as military officers, interpreters, jurists, doctors, and calligraphers. The Paks' rising status was verified as they expanded their intermarriage network, and the family began adapting to the colonial era.

Chapters 4 and 5 explore the Paks during their golden age (1880–1905). They thrived the most during the Korean Empire period (1897–1910), as their activities began appearing in official royal records. Nonetheless, the Paks as a family never reached the utmost prominence. They became involved in modern institutions such as the Independence Club (1896–1898), commercial corporations, and churches. Chapter 5 traces the Tanyang U in-law line who shared similar experiences with the Miryang Pak. The U family participated in various modern institutional systems, organizations, and activities, but they had to discontinue their involvement at the onset of Japanese rule. In this regard, their destiny differed from the common understanding that *chungin* advocates of reform responded positively to Japan turning Korea into a protectorate (1905–1910).

Chapter 6 examines the dissolution period (1905–1945) of the Paks as a lineage, who had to begin living ordinary lives of various sorts from the start of Japanese colonial rule. The author aptly sums up their predicament in the following sentence: "... [S]ome Paks expressed resentment toward the colonial state, and others served it dutifully, while the majority struggled for survival." (8). Various examples of their professions, such as school teacher, colonial police officer, and merchant, are discussed in this chapter.

Though the book is the story of the Paks, it is not easy to follow. The biggest obstacle comes from esoteric terms originally written in Chinese Characters, such as names of persons and places as well as official titles and ranks.

Although the author has made great efforts to overcome terminology problems, reading his earlier articles published in the process of writing the book will help increase its accessibility.²

Organizational Characteristics and Virtues

In broad outline, the characteristics and content of the book can be described as follows: It is a *longue durée* history that covers the early modern period (1500–1880) to the modern period (1880–1945). It is a history of social hierarchy which focuses on how *chungin* status was formed, settled, and transformed, and also a family history of the Miryang Pak. Methodologically, the book is a statistical study based on vast databases of genealogical records, Chosŏn civil service examination rosters, household registration (*hojŏk*) documents, and other sources. In addition, archival research on various primary sources as well as oral history is utilized in the book.

If we look at these characteristics in more detail, the first and most outstanding thing that should be noted is that this single monograph deals with more than three hundred years of history. Moreover, the subject of the study is the status of *chungin*, who did not leave a large quantity of their own documents, and it is worth noting that the primary sources for this study are genealogical records. According to the author, Hildi Kang's research is the only *longue durée* history of a similar kind.³ There are studies of particular *chungin* families during a particular period, such as the Koryŏ-Chosŏn transition, the mid-Chosŏn, the late Chosŏn, or the Open Port period (1876–1910). These studies are limited to delineating a family line based on genealogical records and verifying biographical information about the family's members. The most significant reason for such a phenomenon is that available resources are limited.

2. Eugene Y. Park, "Imagined Connections in Early Modern Korea, 1500–1894: Representations of Northern Elite Miryang Pak Lineages in Genealogies," *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 21, no. 1 (2008): 1–27; "Saeroun kajoksa ūi ch'ugu: kŭndae Han'guk ūi chokpo p'yŏnch'an kwa chunginch'ung ūi panŭng," *Yŏksa munje yŏn'gu* 20 (2008): 139–167; "Mukwa ūi segye," *Han'guksa simin kangjuwa* 46 (2010): 137–153.

3. Hildi Kang, *Family Lineage Records as Resources for Korean History: A Case Study of Thirty-Nine Generations of the Sinch'ŏn Kang Family (720 A.D.–1955)* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007). For an assessment of this work, see p. 197, note 13. Park points out that the Sinch'ŏn Kang that form the object of this study was formed as a "family" only after the seventeenth century, when various unrelated descent groups with the surname Kang but with different clan seats (*pon'gwan*) were brought together to form the Sinch'ŏn Kang.

It requires a seasoned scholar with great resolution to trace a family genealogy that covers tens of generations. Therefore, this book well represents the extensive time and effort that the author put into it, as well as the exhaustive resources that he has accumulated.

Second, the book examines the history of hierarchy, focusing on a *chungin* line of Miryang Pak. In addition to researching genealogical records of the Miryang Pak, the author wrote his monograph based not only on expansive preliminary research and accumulated resources, but also on a genealogical database of various surnames. In researching the Miryang Pak, the author did not limit himself to investigating *chungin* genealogies but also examined comprehensive genealogies (*taedongbo*) of aristocrats as well as different editions of genealogies of aristocrats and *chungin*, depending on whom he was investigating. That is the fundamental strength of this study. Therefore, the author was able to generate original arguments and insights and could also pose questions that challenge conventional perspectives or dominant discourses. The following are his core questions:

- 1) When was the status of specialist *chungin* residing in Seoul established?
- 2) Were *chungin* supportive of Japan's takeover of Korea and the subsequent colonial rule?
- 3) What kinds of attitudes did *chungin* have toward genealogies after the nineteenth century?
- 4) How reliable are Korean genealogies?

1) It is commonly accepted among scholars that specialist *chungin* appeared in the seventeenth century, but the author suggests that a specialist *chungin* family underwent successive stages of evolution in early modern Korea. In the case of the subject Miryang Pak family, it was not until the beginning of the nineteenth century when at least some of the members achieved bona fide *chungin* status. The author also argues that the Miryang Pak were able to acquire their position through building marriage connections with lower-level army officers, *chungin*, merchants, and illegitimate children of the aristocracy as well as holding management rights for royal estates in Kyŏnggi province and land in Ch'ungch'ŏng province.

2) The author challenges the dominant discourse that *chungin* collaborated with Japan's protectorate rule and colonial domination, as seen in representative cases like Yun Ch'ihŏ (a descendant of a seventeenth-century illegitimate son of an aristocratic bureaucrat), Ch'oe Namsŏn (from a specialist *chungin* line), and Yi Kwangsu (from the northwest). The author quotes Han Yŏng'u's survey history of Korea, *Tasi ch'annŭn uri yŏksa* [Our history rediscovered], as

follows: “Status-seeking *chungin* who lacked strong self-esteem ultimately welcomed Western culture, and moreover many of them became pro-Japanese collaborators” (2004, 412). On occasion, he also cites Kyung Moon Hwang’s monograph, *Beyond Birth*, only to dispute his arguments,⁴ and Hwang responded with a critical book review.⁵ Taking the Miryang Pak and the Tanyang U in-laws as his case studies, Park argues that these *chungin* families were most successful professionally and financially and even played the role of visionaries for modernization during the Korean Empire period, but all of their achievements ended and were lost once Japan’s protectorate rule and colonization began. They lost their positions, and their various businesses collapsed. In addition, their assets depreciated due to currency reform. It is questionable whether his case study can be generally applicable to other *chungin* cases. However, the author was successful in persuasively describing a number of circumstances where “lesser-known” *chungin* or persons with secondary status, unlike certain “prominent” figures, could not cooperate with Japanese colonial power.

A further strength of the book is its analysis of the history of one *chungin* family after the Korean Empire period as micro-history, which belongs to *longue durée* accounts. Instead of typical, fixed, and a priori images of *chungin*, the book introduces the ways in which various common individuals such as pro-Japanese police officers, teachers, and entrepreneurs acclimated to or struggled against the era.

3) It is not easy to trace a *chungin* genealogy in contemporary Korean genealogical records. This is where the relevant statistical analysis of this book shines. Among two hundred *chungin* family lines recorded in the *Record of Surname Origins* (*Sŏngwŏllok*), which is tantamount to a comprehensive genealogy for *chungin*, the author determined the ways in which 80 of them were recorded in the modern genealogies. Twenty-four out of 80 *chungin* lines no longer appear in modern genealogical records. Thirty-one out of the remaining 56 lines suspended compiling genealogies by the nineteenth century, and some of them did so even earlier. In 25 cases, the minimum number of family members is recorded in modern editions written from the nineteenth century. Fifty out of 200 *chungin* lines in the *Record of Surname Origins* have

4. Kyung Moon Hwang, *Beyond Birth: Social Status in the Emergence of Modern Korea* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), pp. 74–75, 106–160, 248–249, 345–349.

5. Kyung Moon Hwang, “Book Review: Park, Eugene Y. 2014, *A Family of No Prominence: The Descendants of Park Tŏkhwa and the Birth of Modern Korea*,” *Journal of Family History* 40, no. 1 (2015): 128–130.

surname-ancestral seat combinations which do not appear in the *Comprehensive Genealogy of Ten Thousand Surnames* (*Mansŏng taedongbo*), a record of prominent aristocrat lineages. At least 31 (61 percent) out of 50 *chungin* lines do not appear in the census of South Korea.

What do these numbers suggest? The author's view is that with the collapse of the status system in the nineteenth century, *chungin* invented tradition by forging their genealogies like commoners or those of low-born ancestry, pushing the founding date of their families back to the fifteenth or sixteenth century, or incorporating their genealogies into those of aristocratic lines. The author takes the case of the Haeju Kim, a specialist *chungin* family, as representative since the Kims changed their ancestral seat from Haeju to the more prestigious Ch'ŏngp'ung sometime between 1885 and 1907. As revealed by Edward W. Wagner, the renowned independence activist and statesman, Kim Kyusik, is from the family.

Moreover, to all intents and purposes *chungin* stopped compiling genealogies from the end of the nineteenth century. Compared to earlier times, less than one-fourth of the number of descendants appear in the genealogy editions published after the middle of the nineteenth century.

4) It is extremely open-ended and challenging to ask what Korean genealogical records really tell us. The author's position is revealed in the prologue, where he states that Koreans tend not to know about their ancestors more than four generations removed, those who lived before the twentieth century. His research was prompted by his realization that most Koreans do not know the roles of their patrilineal ancestors before the March First Movement of 1919.⁶

The third virtue of this book is that the author examines the history of his own family, the Miryang Pak. He points out that, for example, the Ch'öllyŏng Hyŏn, especially members of Hyŏn Sun's family living in the U.S., have emphasized their roles as "diplomats" and "independence activists" through memoirs and books.⁷ Although it may have escaped my attention, I have not yet heard of such a history of a *chungin* family ever being written in South Korea. The obstacles that domestic researchers confront in such studies are the

6. See p. 10 of the book under review, and also Park, "Saeroun kajoksa ūi ch'ugu," 141–142.

7. David Hyun and Yong Mok Kim, ed., *My Autobiography: The Reverend Soon Hyun* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2003); Peter Hyun, *MAN SEI: The Making of a Korean American* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1986); Peter Hyun, *In the New World: The Making of a Korean American*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995); David Hyŏn, ed. Kim Yŏngmok, *Sajin ūro ponŭn aeguk chisa Hyŏn Sun moksa ūi Taehan tongnip undong* (Han'guk tongnip yŏksa hyŏphoe, 2002).

difficulties in collecting oral histories of the descendants of *chungin* and confirming genealogical records. The fundamental strategy and method to research a family history consist of extensive archival research and oral history.

The methodological strength of the book is its archival research, in particular research of genealogies. The core data utilized is an extensive database of genealogies. As for the research method for tracing the Miryang Pak, the author first examined genealogical records of the family published in various periods. The research subjects were approached from three perspectives: career, marriage and residential patterns.

The author first used genealogies to verify the career of a subject. By studying documents such as veritable records (*sillok*), the *Records of Daily Reflection* (*Ilsŏngnok*), examination rosters (*pangmok*), meritorious subject rosters (*kongsillok*), the royal protocols of the Chosŏn Dynasty (*ŭigwe*), certified government records (*tŭngnok*), and land transaction documents, the author tracked down whether a subject really existed, when and how a genealogy was compiled, and what content changed in each edition of the genealogy.

Next, the author researched the wife of a subject along with his in-laws. This is where the book shows a qualitative difference from other publications, since it is difficult to find studies which indicate whether in-laws were commoners, hereditary local functionaries (*hyangni*), technical specialist *chungin*, or illegitimate children (*sŏŏl*) of aristocrats by examining their genealogies. This research method was only possible because the author owns very extensive databases which he was able to research for extended periods. That is, the author analyzed a vast number of genealogies, including those of the Kimhae Kim, Yŏhŭng Min, Taegu Sŏ, Yangch'ŏn Hŏ, Nagan O, Ch'angwŏn Kong, Yonggang P'aeng, Onyang Pang, Tanyang U, Naju Kim, Yŏnan Yi, and Haeju O.⁸ In addition, as the author revealed, he also utilized his own database of 35,053 military examination degree holders, which he assembled based on military examination rosters, the veritable records, genealogies of military examination candidates (*mubo*), and local *yangban* registers (*hyangan*, 150, n. 50).

Lastly, the author traced where his subjects lived, focusing on various points such as their family villages, locations of their government assignments, places where they owned land, and their main houses as well as those of their

8. Genealogies of the following lineages are cited in the references section: Andong Kim, Ch'angnyŏng Cho, Ch'angwŏn Kong, Ch'ŏngju Han, Ch'ŏngp'ung Kim, Chŏnju Yi, Haeju O, Hamyŏl Namgung, Kimhae Kim, Kwangju Yi, Kyŏngju Ch'oe, Kyŏngju Kim, Miryang Pak (various editions, including those of branch lineages such as the Kyujŏnggong branch), Nag'an O, Naju Chŏng, Naju Kim, Okch'ŏn Chŏn, Onyang Pang, Taegu Sŏ, Tanyang U, Yŏng'an Yi, Yonggang P'aeng, Yŏnju Han, Hanyang Yu (as recorded in a comprehensive Yu genealogy).

concubines. For this study, he utilized transaction documents for fields, rice paddies and other kinds of land, census registers, and *chejök tŭngbon* (a certified copy of a household registration record showing, for a given registration address, all current members as well as once-registered but no longer current members). In the case of household registers, the author studied microfilm copies (Microfilm M 000797) available at Langson Library, the University of California, Irvine. The original copies are held at the Kyoto University Museum and filed as *Kankoku koseki seisatsu*. Among the household registration documents for the capital, Seoul (Hansŏng), the author further investigated the family backgrounds of famous figures who lived at the end of the Korean Empire, including Kim Iksŭng, who was the youngest uncle of Kim Kyusik, Namgung Ōk, Yi Kŭnbae, and Yun Hyojŏng, as well as those of the Miryang Pak's in-laws such as P'aeng Hanju, U Ch'anggi, U Hangjŏng, and U Kyŏngmyŏng.⁹

The use of *chejök tŭngbon* stands out in this book. The author examined the *chejök tŭngbon* of Kim Ch'anggwŏn, Kim Pongnyuk, Madam Haeju O, Pak Kyŏngjun, Pak P'yŏngch'i, Pak Pyŏngsŏn, Pak T'aesik, Pang Ch'anbŏm, and U Hangjŏng. All of them most likely had some family relation to the author. That is, the use of *chejök tŭngbon* proves that the book is a family history. The period prior to the 2000s was a good time for researchers because they had free access to *chejök tŭngbon* as long as they knew the address and name of the people they were studying (after 2000, only a direct descendant of a certain *hoju* (head of household) can legally request a copy of his *chejök tŭngbon*).

Fourth, this work of family history uses oral history as a major part of its methodology. The author made full use of oral history to describe moments from the modern era, ranging from the Korean Empire to the colonial period and even after liberation. He interviewed the patrilineal descendants of Seoul specialist *chungin* families, namely the Tongju Ch'oe, Kimhae Kim, Miryang Pak, Onyang Pang, and Kyŏngju Kim. Those include Pak Pyŏnghae, Kim Yunsik, Pak Kŭndong, Cho Ch'uja, Pak Yŏnggil, Pang Kijun, Pak T'aewŏn, and Yi Sangŏk. For this reason, the book is vivid and lively, qualities which are not usually demonstrated in written history. At the same time, there is the possibility of distortion, overstatement, glamorization, omission, and entanglement along with learned recollections, which are inherent to memory and oral statements.

9. Although the author points out that the census registers at Kyoto University have not been extensively mined, research by Kim Yŏngmo, Cho Sŏngyun, and Cho Ŭn has used this material for studies of family and status system in the Seoul area during the Korean Empire. Also, there is an ongoing project by the Korean Studies Research Center at Inha University and the Academy of Korean Studies to collect and publish this material.

In particular, the book graphically describes how the lives of Pak T'aesik, U Hangjŏng, and P'aeng Hanju changed through the brief period from the Korean Empire to Japanese colonial rule. When stating the fact that the daughter of Pak T'aesik became the concubine of U Hangjŏng's son, U Kimyŏng, and the possibility that the latter was infertile, the author, unlike the ways he deals with individuals from earlier periods, clearly reveals U Kimyŏng's human face by depicting his life based on *chejŏk tŭngbon* and oral history. With considerable care, the author describes and evaluates the "pro-Japanese collaboration" of individuals such as a police officer, Pak Changhwan, whose name appears in a contemporary biographical encyclopedia of pro-Japanese collaborators (*Ch'inil inmyŏng taesajŏn*).

Some details may reflect inaccuracies of oral history. For example, the author mentions that Pak T'aesik's third son, Pak Ch'angnae, interacted with Sin Ikhŭi and Cho Pyŏngok while working as a teacher, based on various interviews with Cho Ch'uja, Pak Kŭndong, and Pak Yonggil. However, Sin stayed in Shanghai for 26 years in exile from 1919 until he returned to Korea in 1945. He studied at Waseda University after graduating from the government-established Seoul Foreign Language School in 1908, and he taught at Chungdong School and Posŏng Law and Commercial School. Therefore, if Pak Ch'angnae was acquainted with Sin, it would have been around 1908 or between 1913 and 1919. In comparison, it is likely that indeed Mun Seyŏng, the next-door neighbor of Pak, scolded Pak for not being as patriotic.¹⁰

Prospects and Questions

Overall, this book is an interesting read. By tracing the Miryang Pak *chungin* line, the book provides diverse and vivid voices regarding the status system of the Chosŏn era. Therefore, by looking at the tip of the iceberg that is the Miryang Pak, the readers can imagine the massive bulk of information underneath, that is the *chungin*, status systems, and genealogy. Since the book

10. Ch'ŏngnam Mun Seyŏng was the first Korean to publish a han'gŭl dictionary, the *Chosŏnŏ sajŏn*, in 1938. During the period of compiling the dictionary between 1929 and 1938, he lived consecutively at T'ongin-dong 146 pŏnji (1930), T'ongin-dong 57 pŏnji (1933), and Nuha-dong 193 pŏnji (1946). With the help of his in-laws he acquired a house in Nusang-dong 159-9 pŏnji in 1937. Mun Seyŏng's son remembers his father saying "although Syngman Rhee subsisted on apple juice during the colonial period, I worked for the independence movement eating only soybean paste soup. During the colonial period I compiled a dictionary of our language, yet received no [favorable] treatment after the liberation." Pak Yonggu, "Chosŏnŏ sajŏn chŏja Mun Seyŏng yŏn'gu," *Sach'ong* 73 (2011), 94.

traces lines of multiple individuals from the sixteenth through the twentieth century, it is not easy to follow. Readers are asked to consult the endnotes thoroughly when it comes to important points. The most memorable aspect of this book is the author's evaluation of genealogy, *chungin*, status systems, and collaboration with the colonial state. There are challenging questions which oppose dominant discourses and common knowledge, so I am looking forward to his future research for the answers.

At the same time, I am curious as to why this kind of monograph has not been written in South Korea. First of all, it might be difficult to assemble such a vast database. Second, it must be hard to take the findings from such a database and put them together into a coherent text. Third, it would not be easy to have such a work published in Korean. The author was able to publish this monograph because of his accumulation of data, scholarly efforts, and success in storytelling, as well as his national and linguistic freedom from very real restrictions like genealogy, family, and status.

Starting from a criticism of historical and genealogical conceptions derived from a focus on aristocrats and royal blood, what does this book achieve? I should acknowledge that the book is successful in portraying *chungin* as having diverse qualities and ways of life throughout history, while criticizing a simplified and formulaic understanding of *chungin* lives. Nonetheless, it is apparent that the author's subject of inquiry is a special *chungin* line who attempted to advance in society using various means and endeavors, and who were able to leave records of such activities in the form of written documents even if they belonged to "a family of no prominence."

For sure, this book is not a history of the people of social status such as slaves, who were liberated and allowed to have a surname and a designated ancestral seat only through the reform of the status system in 1894. Korean society tends to exhibit "group amnesia" regarding the past system of slavery. Most Koreans deftly believe that there was no racism, at least not like that in the United States. As a result of urbanization and social mobility, they also believe themselves to be the descendants of aristocrats, so arguments like "the slavery system of Chosŏn was more humane than those of foreign countries" are unwittingly widespread. I am curious about how the history of "the people," who could not leave written documents about themselves, should be studied.

From the reader's position, I should ask the following questions. Firstly, why does the author study genealogies? Why does he specifically study *chungin*? I ask these questions due to my curiosity about his motivation and the process through which the author became devoted to this subject. It is not easy to

imagine what it means to study this abstruse field and, more importantly, to study it in the U.S. Considering that the book was dedicated to Edward W. Wagner, who was an authority on social history of Chosŏn Korea, one can assume that it is the latest part of an academic lineage that studies Korean history based on genealogy.

Throughout my reading of the book, I was also curious about various stages of research as undertaken by the author. I was wondering if this book, the result of enormous effort and patience on the part of the author, has methodologies, databases of genealogies, military exam graduate genealogies, and additional features that could fascinate other scholars. Finally, there is my question about what historical perspective the author assumes or postulates.

I look forward to seeing more works by the author on the historical status and roles of *chungin* from the late Chosŏn period to the Open Port period to the colonial period, and also the status and roles of genealogy in each period as well as contemporary Korea of the twenty-first century, where genealogies still cast a long shadow.

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