



# For Whom the Line is Drawn: *Korean Indigenous Conceptions of Boundary in the 19th Century and Changes in the Colonial Period*

Sora KIM

## Abstract

*Modern law treats land as real estate, subject to rights of ownership. Land must be immobile and clearly partitioned. Pieces of land are described on cadastral maps, with a link to a unique and permanent location. Yet, before the advent of modern law, how did people recognize each piece of land? The Joseon dynasty made numerous maps and conducted various land surveys. However, there was no sense that land should be divided by drawing lines on paper. Beyond a mere object of ownership, land was considered a basis for feeding the people. Hence, conceptions of land existed in by-play with human activity. Boundaries could not be drawn without consideration of local conditions such as the current status of cultivation. This paper will demonstrate Korean indigenous senses of boundary in the 19th century. The Gwangmu Land Register will be compared with land registers and cadastral maps from the Japanese colonial period to reveal key characteristics of late Joseon conceptions of land demarcation. I will show how boundaries shifted between humans and land, among plots, and within Korean society. Moreover, I highlight how new types of land demarcations in turn separated humans from their environment and reconceived land as immovable (real) estate.*

**Keywords:** conceptions of land, senses of boundary, buffer zone, Gwangmu Land Register, land survey, cadastral map, Jigsawmap

---

Sora KIM is PhD candidate in the Department of Korean History, Seoul National University.  
E-mail: sorakim.history@gmail.com.

## Introduction

In the present day, most countries use an address system that assigns a unique address to each piece of land. This applies not only to building sites, but also to farmland, to forests, and even to roads and riverbeds; each has its own address attached to it. With a single line of address and a map, people can locate a desired spot. People accustomed to this address system may consider addresses to be natural elements of the terrain. However, we must keep in mind that the address is a social commitment. A great number of social regulations and agreements had to be established before the limited series of letters and numbers that constitute an address could suffice to provide the location of a specific place.<sup>1</sup>

Ultimately, the purpose of the modern system of addresses is to set a permanent code to designate a specific location. The ideal is for anyone to be able to locate a given point at any time by consulting that point's address. This requires the additional process of permanently fixing an address to each parcel of land after that address has been assigned. For this process, the following two preconditions must be covered. Firstly, the land must be immobile. The land—the objects—must be fixed in order to assign to it a permanent address. Second, the plot of land must be clearly partitioned. The area indicated by a unique address must be distinct, so that people will be talking about the same place when they reference a address. In sum, a stable address system is based on a tacit agreement that land takes the form of a *partible and immovable estate*.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that the concept of real estate emerged with the establishment of modern law. Since real rights (*mulgwon* 物權) under modern law distinguish things (*mulgeon* 物件) between movable assets (*dongsan* 動産) and immovable property (*budongsan* 不動産), land

---

1. In Korea, the address system using lot numbers (*jibeon* 地番) entitled by the colonial land survey in the 1910s has been used for over a century. In 2014, the Korean government decided to adopt and actively promote a new address system by assigning names to each road. Yet even today this road-name address system is not completely settled and is being used together with the previous system. This is because the new road-name system has been unable to completely overcome the existing social consensus favoring the old system.

became the object of rights in the form of real estate.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the need to establish the limits of real right necessitated a clear division of land. In order to convert vast lands into objects of individual real estate, the land must be artificially divided and numbered into mutually distinguishable parcels.<sup>3</sup> Through this process, the land comes to be defined as the subject of real rights and as a legal and economic object with a clear domain. Thus, the issue of boundary emerged as a sensitive matter, over how far the range of each plot would be.

How then did people regard the land before modern law's introduction of the concept of immovable property? What were the perception on land boundaries in the past? This paper will provide some preliminary answers to these questions. I will describe how the concept of boundary and perceptions of land have changed over the centuries; starting from the modern legal regulations in the Republic of Korea, I will go back to the Japanese colonial era (1910–1945), the Korean Empire (Daehan jeguk 大韓帝國, 1897–1910), and then to the Joseon朝鮮 dynasty (1392–1897). I will make a special examination of how the relationship between land and human beings formed and changed during this process.

## Boundary: Draw a Line

Usually, *drawing a line* means creating mutually exclusive domains that cannot be invaded. Divvying up a plot of land today is done by such line-drawing. Land in its natural state is continuous and integral, so individualization and specification are required to transform it into a single legal object. It is the fundamental point of view of the modern legal system basic that land boundaries are artificially drawn border *lines* (Kang 2005,

---

2. Article 98 (Definition of Things) of the Korean Civil Act stipulates that “Things mentioned in this Act shall mean corporeal things, electricity, and other natural forces which can be managed.” Article 99 (Immovables and Movables) of that Act stipulates that “Land and things firmly affixed thereto shall be immovable” and “All things other than immovables shall be movables.” Accessed November 13, 2019, <http://www.law.go.kr/법령/민법>.

3. For this process, see H. Lee (2008), and Lee and Kwon (2012).

153).<sup>4</sup> The Act on the Establishment, Management, etc. of Spatial Data (formerly the Cadastral Act) of Korea defines *boundary* as “a line registered in the cadastral records, which links the boundary points in each parcel by beelines.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, boundaries are determined by connecting pre-set boundary points. Currently, only the state can set boundary points for measurement, only the state can draw boundary lines, and only the state can generate plots of land. This is because the law stipulates that boundary lines can be drawn only through official cadastral surveys (Kang 2005, 157; B. Lee 1997, 131).

In concept, these boundary lines have location and length, but no width or area (T. Kim 1995, 31). Moreover, these lines are invisible since they are drawn on the cadastral map, not on reality. Thus, every plot delineated by the demarcation is also invisible. Although it is clear that the piece of land exists spatially on a map, it is too difficult to check the actual realm of each plot with the naked eye (H. Lee 2008, 129).

Under such a system, there is no room to consider the intentions of those who actually occupy and use a given piece of land. Where to set the boundary points is not determined by agreement between those occupying adjoining lands, but uniformly designated by a national standard. Since connecting the points by beeline falls under the jurisdiction of state-certificated cadastral surveyors, the survey is permanent unless an obvious error is revealed (T. Kim 1995, 30). People with no relationship with the land are authorized to determine territorial boundaries under the name of *objectivity*, while those who actually live on the land can exert influence solely within the *official* boundary lines of the map.

Even though the boundary line is merely an imaginary line connecting coordinates, and thus without any actual width, the line is given width when marked on the cadastral map. No matter how thin the line is drawn, is has

---

4. B. Kim, et al. (2005, 170) provide an alternate explanation, whereby, “Legally, the borderline refers to an extremely thin line with different real rights on either side, or a face with different real rights on the other side.”

5. Paragraph 26 of Article 2 (Definitions) of the Act on the Establishment, Management, etc. of Spatial Data of Korea, accessed November 13, 2019, <http://www.law.go.kr/법령/공간정보의구축및관리등에관한법률>.

a scale. Thus, if we then translate the cadaster map back to reality, it must create an empty area along the border between plots that no one has been aware of. This is a distortion that occurs when the map merely portraying the real is imposed back upon that reality. There is another issue caused by boundary points. To undertake a cadastral survey, it is necessary to set up a standard network of points throughout the country (Gwak and Koh 2009, 285). The network is composed of several layers of boundary points, which include some errors; all the plots on a map are bent in a specific direction; the location as depicted on the map differing from the actual one in reality. The accumulated effect of these errors is the problem of overlap among land pieces.<sup>6</sup>

When boundary disputes arise over discrepancies between a map and reality, which side will the law take? The Supreme Court in Korea has followed the principle that boundaries on cadastral maps have priority over actual physical boundaries unless there are obvious errors in official measurement. As long as a plot is registered in the cadaster, the character of the land is defined by records in the register (G. Shin 2014, 85).<sup>7</sup> It is also the official stance that recorded boundaries be trusted over real ones, which are variable (Kang 2005, 160–162). In other words, when records and reality differ, the boundary of the physical land is redefined and reorganized to accord with the fixed record; reality is ruled by invisible lines drawn on a map.

The whole series of land-related policies began during the Japanese colonial period: dividing land pieces by beelines connecting boundary points, putting the process under the jurisdiction of the state, and giving absolute authority to the records. The most representative example of this process is the *toji josasaeop* 土地調査事業 (colonial land survey, 1910–1918) based on the following rule: “arrange boundary points to be

---

6. The place where such an overlap issue occurs as a result of the map's boundaries not being in accord with physical reality is called the *jijeok bulbuhapji* 地籍不符合地 (non-coincidence land). In 2014, about 15 percent of Korean territory contained incidents of non-coincidence with more than ten adjoining parcels. For further details, see H. Kim (1998); Kwun, et al. (2004); G. Shin (2014); and S. Lee (2001).

7. For further details, see G. Shin (2016, 225).

able to demonstrate the actual shape of a parcel by drawing continuous beelines connecting the points.”<sup>8</sup> Plots of land readjusted by this survey had to be registered on the national real estate registration system to become recognized legal objects in colonial society, and the results of this process are maintained to this day. Defining land as real estate, dividing it perfectly, and representing in as detailed a way as possible those divisions on paper was totally different from the land management policy of the Joseon dynasty. Thus, we should now examine perceptions on land management in the Joseon period.

### Boundaries in Joseon Society

Notions of boundaries during the Joseon period are clearly reflected in discussions on the border with China. Today, the borders between neighboring countries are obviously drawn as a line. If there is a mountain range between two countries, the ridgeline becomes the border. If there is a river, a line drawn through the center of the shipping lane is treated as the border. And if there is a stream, the mid-point point between the two shores is considered the borderline (B. Kim et al. 2005, 170). In this way, even though there are well-defined natural geographic features, boundary lines between countries are not determined by them, but by finding a *middle line* through them.

However, until the 19th century, the border between Joseon and China (either the Ming or Qing dynasties) was not formed as such a thin line. Rather, each side set up marginal limits to their respective political sovereignty and created the borderland as a zone. Among maps from the 15th to 17th centuries, none show a clear boundary between Joseon and China as a line. But all maps delineate the *zhamen* 柵門 (*chaekmun* in Korean; “the gate”) of China and the Yalu River—the marginal limit of Joseon territory—and the vacant space between these two. This

---

8. Clause 67 of the “Instruction of the Provisional Land Survey Bureau” (Sebucheungnyang silsigyujeong 細部測量實施規定) of the 1910s, quoted from T. Kim (1995, 35).

72-kilometer wide empty zone served as the border between the two countries. This suggests that the concept of border at that time was not a line but a *surface* (Nam 2012). This perception of borders was a legacy from at least the Goryeo高麗 dynasty (918–1392). The boundaries between the Goryeo, Khitan 契丹, and Jurchen 女真 described provisional territorial limits on authority for the respective political power. It did not indicate a clearly divided geographical boundary line, but rather had characteristics as a *boundary band* (*gyeonggyedae* 境界帶).<sup>9</sup>

This is not limited to the case of Korean history. Siam and Burma were arch-rivals and had numerous border conflicts starting from the 16th century. Nevertheless, when the British, who had conquered southern Burma in the 19th century, negotiated the border with the court of Siam, the latter responded that a confirmation of the territorial demarcation line was not an urgent issue. The Siamese court reportedly told the British, “With respect to what is said about the boundaries...no boundaries could ever be established between the Siamese and the Burmese. But the English desire to have these fixed.” This reply was regarded as naive by the British, but for the Siamese officials there was nothing strange about it since “the boundaries between the Siamese and Burmese consisted of a tract of Mountains and forest, which is several miles wide and which could not be said to belong to either nation” (Winichakul 1994, 64–65). To both nations, Siam and Burma, the distinction between their respective territories had always been clear without the British linear type of boundary. Their case is quite similar to the boundary issue between Joseon and China. We should keep in mind that national borders are not natural divisions, but political products; therefore, no matter how clearly borders are drawn on the map, people can and will often ignore them (Baud and Schendel 1997, 211). Further, one should recall the fact that *borderlands* were turned into *bordered lands* under the current system of international law (Adelman and Aron 1999, 816). This tells us that the concept of linear boundaries was uncommon before the modern period.

---

9. See Song (2005, 86–109). Although Song’s article focuses on the changes in border recognition from borderland to borderline during the Goryeo dynasty, the tendency to think of the frontier as a zone, rather than a line, continued even into the late Joseon dynasty.

Places not demarcated by a borderline were not only at the frontier but even within a country. In general, natural terrain, such as mountains and streams, separated provinces and counties (J. Kim 2003, 105). Even small villages were not clearly partitioned. With several terms denoting a village, such as *dong* 洞 and *ri* 里, in contemporary sources, researchers have implicitly assumed that villages in Joseon must have been visually and physically distinct. However, even in late-19th-century Joseon there are no materials indicating obvious boundaries between such local entities. A village simply meant a bunch of houses without spatial meaning (K. Kim 2019). In other words, there were no clear, objective boundaries for villages, but only subjective divisions were active.

In some cases, for administrative purposes, people who lived for years in the same place registered in village A or village B in the annual census (You-Jin Lee 2019). Likewise, the village was a simple matter of grouping without substantial and spatial meaning. This was possible because people of the period did not perceive of boundaries as having to be distinct.

### The Concept of Boundary in Joseon Daily Life

How were boundaries between neighboring land plots recognized? During the Joseon dynasty, land and population were the main sources of tax revenue. The country managed each of these through nationwide surveys. The population was registered in household registers (*hojeok* 戶籍) every three years. Meanwhile, land was surveyed throughout the country with the survey results recorded in the land registers (*yangan* 量案). There was a common feature between these two registers. Namely, there were no additional means for identifying where families or land plots were located. Although the families were numbered in the household registers, the register did not indicate the real locations of their houses. Moreover, the numbering was renewed every three years, so the household numbers did not function as a permanent address.

A study analyzing the pattern of numbering and actual location of each house by comparing the household registers with the colonial cadastral



maps points out the irregularity of village groupings and household numbering in the Joseon registers. Even though some households (*ho* 戶) belonged to the same group (*tong* 統), each household lived far apart from other households within the same group, and the group numbering was in disorder. Identifying the exact location of a specific household using the registers is impossible for a third party who lacks local knowledge (K. Kim 2018). Besides, there was no visual record in the land registers indicating the actual locations of plots. The only clues to a plot's location are the land category and the names of owners of neighboring plots.

坪前外昌

				安	
第一止化		第二止化		第三止化	
直番	二留	直番	二留	直番	二留
南許趙	南許趙	南許趙	南許趙	南許趙	南許趙
西全八番	西全八番	西全八番	西全八番	西全八番	西全八番
三三	三三	三三	三三	三三	三三
東	東	東	東	東	東
南許趙	南許趙	南許趙	南許趙	南許趙	南許趙
西全八番	西全八番	西全八番	西全八番	西全八番	西全八番
積九百二十八尺	積九百二十八尺	積九百二十八尺	積九百二十八尺	積九百二十八尺	積九百二十八尺
壹畧	壹畧	壹畧	壹畧	壹畧	壹畧
結致負參束	結致負參束	結致負參束	結致負參束	結致負參束	結致負參束
時主趙命熙	時主趙命熙	時主趙命熙	時主趙命熙	時主趙命熙	時主趙命熙
作許銅	作許銅	作許銅	作許銅	作許銅	作許銅
積三千九百五十八尺		積三千九百五十八尺		積三千九百五十八尺	
壹畧		壹畧		壹畧	
結致負參束		結致負參束		結致負參束	
時主趙命熙		時主趙命熙		時主趙命熙	
作許元一		作許元一		作許元一	

Figure 1. Gwangmu 光武 Land Register.<sup>10</sup> In the second row, information on the four neighboring plots is recorded

Source: *Chungcheongnam-do Hansan-gun yangan* 忠清南道韓山郡量案 (奎17672 vol. 9), Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies (public domain).<sup>11</sup>

10. The Korean Empire conducted a national land survey from 1898 to 1904. The results of the survey were compiled in the Gwangmu Land Register, named after the reign era of Emperor Gwangmu (formerly King Gojong).

11. For detailed information, see [http://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17672\\_](http://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17672_)

Figure 1 is a page from the Gwangmu Land Register (*Gwangmu yangan* 光武量案), itself the product of the Gwangmu Land Survey (*Gwangmu yangjeon* 光武量田, 1898–1904), conducted at the very end of the Joseon period. The first row order gives the plot number, surveying direction, land shape, and land category. The second row then gives an outline of the plot's shape and basic information on the surrounding four parcels. The third row gives the area, grade, and tax quota of the plot. The last line includes the names of owner and tenants.

Throughout the Joseon dynasty the government conducted national land surveys, with the results compiled in land registers. Although the details changed over time, the main content was almost always similar to the above example from the Gwangmu Land Register. Interestingly, over the five centuries of its existence the Joseon government did not attach any cadastral map to these registers. How then did they identify the location of each parcel? China and Japan also made land registers over the same period. To be specific, China's *yulin tuce* 魚鱗圖冊 and Japan's *kenchicho* 檢地帳 land surveys contained sketch maps indicating the locations of pieces of land. But there were no cadastral maps related to the land registers of Joseon. The location of each parcel had to be verified solely through textual description. What is more, plot numbers were renewed for each land survey, so the numbers also could not function as a form of permanent address.

The absence of cadastral maps or a stable address system in Joseon Korea over the centuries meant there were no visual tool for determining the location of a specific plot of land. But on the flip side, we can conjecture that the textual information in surveys was useful and detailed enough to locate a specific place using the indigenous sense of boundary. As mentioned above, the address system is a social contract. The symbolization of a land parcel's address must have been applied according to the Joseon society's own standard; this would have been expressed by numbering the land and

---

00&notes=basic, accessed November 13, 2019. *Chungcheongnam-do Hansan-gun yangan* 忠清南道韓山郡量案 (Gwangmu Land Register for Hansan-gun county, Chungcheongnam-do province) was compiled by the Yangji amun 量地衙門 (Ministry of Land Survey). Currently these registers are held by the Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies with book number 奎 17672. For a detailed bibliography, see Kyujanggak ed. (2013, 3:239–243).

households. The problem is we have no clues for understanding Joseon perceptions of addresses. A wide range of previous studies have analyzed the records of Joseon land registers, but those studies have been unable to explain where the recorded plots of land were located.

To overcome this limitation, software that links the Gwangmu Land Register to the modern cadaster was developed as an interdisciplinary project.<sup>12</sup> This software draws a virtual cadastral map with records in the Joseon register and matches it to the colonial one in order to spatially locate plots of land. In this paper, I would like to use this tool to examine how the indigenous perception of boundary and land played out in daily life during the Joseon era.

## Demarcation of Land

This paper analyzes the land registers of four villages in Hansan-gun county, Chungcheongnam-do province. For this county, the Gwangmu Land Register was compiled in July 1901 and the Colonial Land Register (*toji daejang* 土地臺帳) undertaken by the colonial Japanese government in Korea was made on November 1913. Since there is only a twelve-year gap between both surveys, I was able trace how boundaries changed over the course of modernization.

As the first step, I compared land demarcations in these two periods by using the aforementioned software. And then, I matched the same plots of land in both Gwangmu and Colonial Land Registers to check the actual location of plots on the colonial cadastral map. Finally, I compared the number of land pieces that composed a plot in each register. The matching cases can be arranged into four types by the number of pieces as below.

---

12. This software, named Jigsawmap, was developed several years ago through collaboration between Korean historians and computer engineers at Seoul National University. For more information, see <http://hcil.snu.ac.kr/research/jigsawmap>, accessed November 13, 2019.

**Table 1.** Matching Types between the Gwangmu (Gwa) and Colonial (Col) Land Registers

Unit: Pair (%)

Village \ Type	Total	Gwa 1 plot to Col 1 plot	Gwa 1 to Col multi	Gwa multi to Col 1	Gwa multi to Col multi
A (Gayang-ri)	406 (100)	232 (57.1)	135 (33.3)	33 (8.1)	6 (1.5)
B (Mamyeong-ri)	393 (100)	218 (55.5)	119 (30.3)	40 (10.2)	16 (4.1)
C (Sinjang-ri)	341 (100)	165 (48.4)	127 (37.2)	22 (6.5)	27 (7.9)
D (Changoe-ri)	375 (100)	210 (56.0)	88 (23.5)	47 (12.5)	30 (8.0)
Total	1,515 (100)	825 (54.5)	469 (31.0)	142 (9.4)	79 (5.2)

*Note 1:* The identification of a land plot in one register with its corresponding plot in the other register can be divided into the following categories: 1) where one plot in the Gwangmu Land Register (Gwa) is matched with one plot in the Colonial Land Register (Col); 2) where one plot in the Gwa is matched with multiple plots in the Col; 3) where multiple plots in the Gwa are matched with one plot in the Col; and 4) where multiple plots in the Gwa are matched with multiple plots in the Col.

*Note 2:* Figure in ( ) is a percentage of total matching cases. Numbers are rounded to one decimal place.

In this table, the second row gives a one to one matching case. The third row is one to multiple, the next row is multiple to one piece, and the last is multiple to multiple cases. From this table, we can discern that 54.5 percent of the total were one to one matching cases. This implies that in about half of all plots, land demarcation had not changed between these two land surveys. This seems quite a low percentage considering only twelve years separated the two surveys and because this only refers to changes in demarcation irrespective of changes in ownership. In other words, in the data examined, land demarcation was changed in about 45 percent of parcels over those twelve years.

However, this does refer to physical changes in land demarcation, rather, it refers to changes in the criteria of demarcation between the two periods. For the Joseon period, the fundamental principle on the settlement of a land plot was set in 1443:

In the guideline for land survey, confirmed by the Board of Taxation (Hojo 戶曹) ...multiple neighboring land plots cultivated by a person can be treated as one piece if the owner desires, even though those plots have been separated for a long time.<sup>13</sup>

According to this clause, when a person cultivated several contiguous pieces of land, those pieces could be regarded as one parcel for the national land survey. There was no prior condition requiring every piece to belong to either the same land category or same administrative district. No matter a piece of land's type or its location, the domain of a plot was determined by *who cultivated and managed it*. This reflects the perception of land boundaries at the time; land boundaries were established by one's ability to cultivate that land.

This certainly differs from modern guidelines on land boundary established by the Japanese colonial government. The Japanese Government-General in Korea (Joseon chongdokbu 朝鮮總督府) enacted the Enforcement Regulations on Land Taxation (Jiseryeong sihaeng gyujik 地稅令施行規則) in 1914 with the following clauses:

Article 12. If a part of the land registered as one plot in the land register meets any the below conditions, the land shall be divided.

1. When there is a change in the category of land.
2. When a portion of the land becomes tax-free.
3. When different portions belong to different administrative districts.
4. When a portion of the ownership is transferred.
5. When the right of pledge or the right of superficies of over twenty years is established.
6. For any of the above conditions, demarcation is required.<sup>14</sup>

13. “戶曹啓量田事目...一人所耕連伏者, 雖曾岐而分之, 聽其自願, 都量合錄.” *Sejong sillok*, 14th day of the 11th lunar month, 1443 (25th year of King Sejong's reign), accessed November 13, 2019, [http://sillok.history.go.kr/id/kda\\_12511014\\_002](http://sillok.history.go.kr/id/kda_12511014_002).

14. The Enforcement Regulations on Land Taxation, the 42nd ordinance of the Government-General, April 21, 1914, accessed November 13, 2019, [http://www.law.go.kr/법령/지세령시행규칙/\(00042,19140421\)](http://www.law.go.kr/법령/지세령시행규칙/(00042,19140421)).

According to this article, even if the owner is unchanged, land that contains both paddy and dry fields must be divided into different pieces according to category (condition no. 1 above), with each subsequent piece given a different lot number. This is to say nothing of land that might fall under different administrative districts. Thus, based on this, we can see why there would have been an increase in the number of land parcels following the colonial survey, something confirmed in Table 1.

In Table 1, the third column (“Gwangmu 1 to Colonial multiple”) shows cases where one plot in the Gwangmu Land Register is identified as the same with multiple plots in the colonial register. This percentage is worthy of attention, ranging from 23.5 percent in Village D to 37.2 percent in Village C. In other words, in the case of these villages, about one-third of the total land surveyed was originally made up of single parcels in the Gwangmu survey from the Korean Empire, but over the following twelve or so years up to the colonial land survey was divided into two or more plots. Surely, a large portion of these divisions was the result of changes in ownership over time. Let’s examine more closely the cases of Villages A and D.

**Table 2.** Checking the Sameness in Owner and Land Category among Multiple Plots in the Colonial Land Registers in the Case of *Gwangmu 1 to Colonial Multiple* in Villages A and D

Unit: Pair (%)

Gwa 1 to Col multi in Village A (135 pairs)				Gwa 1 to Col multi in Village D (88 pairs)			
Same owner	45 (33.3)	Different category	27 (60.0)	Same owner	53 (60.2)	Different category	23 (43.4)
		Same category	18 (40.0)			Same category	30 (56.6)
Different owner	90 (66.7)			Different owner	35 (39.8)		

Note: Figure in ( ) is a percentage. Numbers are rounded to one decimal place.

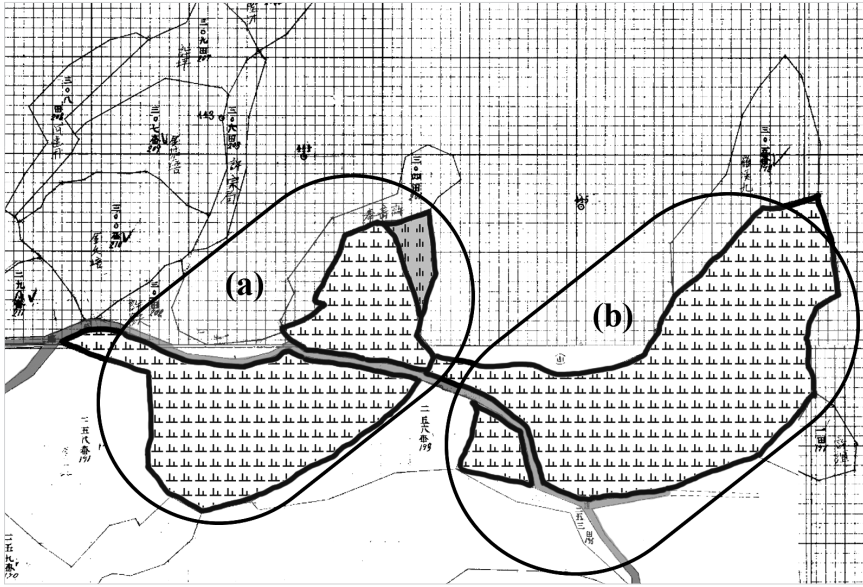
The owner and category of single land plots that were divided into two or more pieces by the Japanese colonial regulation in the two villages are analyzed in Table 2. Here “different owner” denotes a single plot in the

Gwangmu register that was separated into several pieces owned by different persons in the colonial register. As mentioned earlier, these are cases of changes in ownership over the twelve years that separated the two surveys. For Village A, 66.7 percent of the added plots in the colonial survey can be attributed to a change in ownership. In Village D, however, this case accounts for only 39.8 percent. In other words, for Village D, 60 percent of the surveyed land experienced no change in ownership over the twelve years, but for some reason, the plots were still divided into separate plots by the colonial land survey. For Village A, 33.3 percent of cases went through the same process.

In the colonial period, what was the reason for subdividing land that had not changed ownership? We have already seen in Article 12 of the Enforcement Regulations on Land Taxation the numerous conditions that could force the subdividing of land in the colonial period. If an existing parcel was composed of paddy and dry field, the Japanese colonial land survey subdivided the parcel according to land category. Therefore, we should check changes in the designation of land category in newly divided plots. Putting it differently, we can verify land pieces that were subdivided due to differences in the usage type, i.e. land category. The “different category” portion of Table 2 clearly shows this. In Village A, 60 percent of plots that had not changed ownership between the two surveys were subdivided as a result of variances in land type, while this holds true for 43.4 percent in Village D.

Nevertheless, something remains unexplained: the “same category” section. Why was some land still subdivided despite having no change in ownership or land type? The answer is not clear. I would suggest, however, that differences in perceptions of land boundary had a huge impact on land demarcation between the two surveys.

For instance, when we match the Gwangmu Land Register to the colonial cadastral maps, it is often found that pieces of land under the same owner located on both sides of a road or a stream were recorded as one plot in the Gwangmu document. Figures 2 and 3 are representative examples of this.



**Figure 2.** An example from the colonial cadastral map of plots occupying both sides of a road in Village D. Area (a) consists of three plots, no. 257, no. 302, and no. 303. Area (b) contains two plots, no. 254, and no. 255

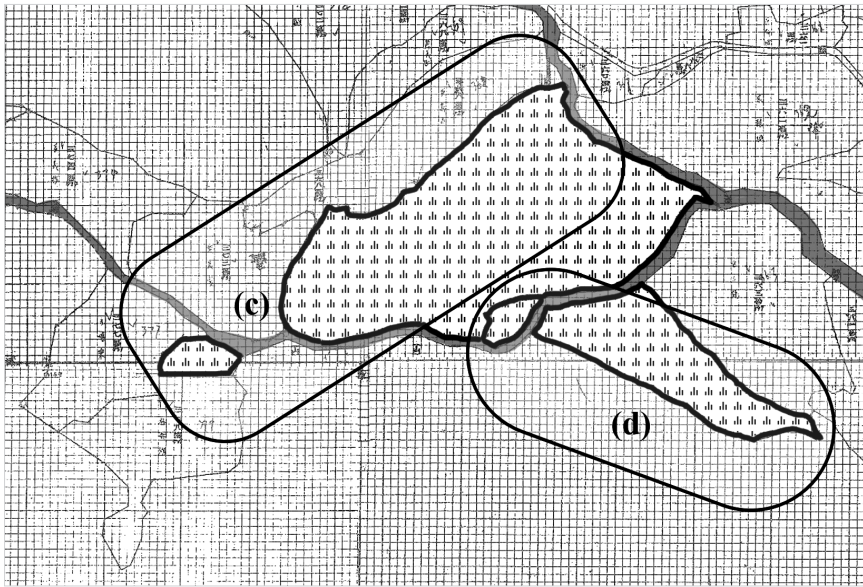
Note:  denotes paddy field.  denotes dry field. The grey line denotes a road.

Source: Figure by author.

In Figure 2, the land pieces with bold borderlines in the two areas of (a) and (b) were each recorded as one plot in the Gwangmu Land Register. In area (a), a paddy field owned by Kim Uibae in the Gwangmu document was divided into three different plots: a paddy field belonging to Kim Yubae, and a paddy and a dry field belonging to Kim Gibae. In area (b), a paddy possessed by Na Uho was split into two paddy fields under the name of Nam Hahui.

It is estimated that the plots in areas (a) and (b) were each owned by one person at the time of the Gwangmu survey. The interesting point is that a road bisected the two plots. This implies that if a person had plots located on both sides of a road, all of them could be regarded as one piece up through the Korean Empire era. Entering the Japanese colonial period, the piece was demarcated along the road and subdivided by owner and land category.





**Figure 3.** The example of plots on both sides of a stream in Village A in the colonial cadastral map. Area (c) consists of two plots, no. 365 and no. 378. Area (d) contains another two plots, no. 364 and no. 380

Note:  denotes paddy field. The blue line designates a stream.

Source: Figure by author.

The case of Village A (Fig. 3) reveals a similar situation. Each of the areas (c) and (d) were recorded as single pieces of land in the Gwangmu register, and both were subsequently subdivided into several pieces by the colonial survey. The remarkable point of this example is that these two plots straddling both sides of a stream, not even a road, were combined as one parcel in the official Gwangmu document. Unlike roads, streams continue to flow and can alter course, which makes it difficult to manage plots that straddle them. Moreover, in area (c), the distance between the two parcels is quite far. Nevertheless, they were regarded as one plot not only in the Korean Empire but also in the preceding Joseon dynasty period for centuries. This is also a result of their demarcation principle whereby multiple plots cultivated by one person were considered as a single piece.

The above four examples are only a few of the various matching cases. Even in one village, Village A, cases of plots consisting of land pieces on both sides of a road or stream is 12.3 percent of the total. By contrast, the Japanese colonial government prohibited the combination of plots located on both sides of roadways, streams, or gullies by Article 13 of the Enforcement Regulations on Land Taxation.<sup>15</sup> As a result, plots were divided and subdivided throughout the colonial era.

As such, there was variation in land divisions between the pre-colonial and the colonial periods even when land category, ownership, and location were unchanged. Yet it is hard to say that such divisions were caused solely by different instructions and regulations regarding land surveys. Rather, one can posit that another primary factor was the essential differences in the perception of boundary and the sense of the land.

### Differences in the Conceptions of Boundary

Until the 19th century, the majority of Joseon state revenue was secured from the land. Joseon only surveyed farmland that produced crops, and the crop yields were a unit of tax assessment. The colonial government, however, surveyed the entire land, to include mountains and swamps, the reason being that the entire land had worth as immovable estates. In Joseon society, however, only land that produced primary products had value. It was no different during the Korean Empire. In traditional Korean society, the issue of *who cultivates the land* was much more important than *where the plot is located*. Thus, the state did not need to demarcate each plot with sharp boundary lines. It was enough to identify how far a sphere of cultivation by the same person extended.

---

15. In Article 13 of the Enforcement Regulations on Land Taxation, conditions under which plots could not be combined into one were as follows; 1. In cases where the land categories of each plot are different; 2. In cases where parcels are separated by roads, streams, or gullies, [http://www.law.go.kr/법령/지세령시행규칙/\(00042,19140421\)](http://www.law.go.kr/법령/지세령시행규칙/(00042,19140421)), accessed November 13, 2019.

In daily life, the matter of boundaries was not a sensitive issue among neighbors in the Joseon era. Most identified plots were cultivated, while ridges or banks served as boundaries between plots. If there was some barren wasteland, it would have been separated off from well-managed farmland.<sup>16</sup> These were the boundaries created spontaneously in daily life based on the land. These natural boundaries manifested themselves visually in the domain of a peasant in the field, but not on any map.

Nevertheless, the colonial government, animated with the spirit of modern law, could not understand the traditional sense of the Joseon people. For Japanese officials, the Korean boundary conception was too vague to determine the *exact* location of a plot. As preliminary work to its land survey of Korea, the Japanese Government-General compiled an interim list for land taxation called the *gyeolsu yeonmyeongbu* 結數連名簿 using the existing registers of the Joseon period. When they attempted to use the *gyeolsu yeonmyeongbu*, however, a serious problem arose in that Japanese officials could not locate exactly where the plots were. Thus, they hurried to make sketch maps, termed *gwaseji gyeonchwido* 課稅地見取圖, which showed the distribution of entire parcels by drawing lines on papers. The Government-General explained the reason for the map-making as “there is no way to identify the location of plots in the list since there has been no map, so the new sketch map will help taxation work by verifying locations” (Choe 2011, 303). The *gwaseji gyeonchwido* was “especially welcomed by Japanese people” since “a clear boundary line between districts and the marking of plots’ locations on maps provided convenience for land verification” (Young-Hak Lee 2011, 66). Likewise, the existing land division and demarcation, familiar and obvious to Koreans, confused the Japanese. It demonstrated the Japanese administrators’ failure to read the Korean indigenous perception of boundary as implied in the existing land registers.<sup>17</sup>

16. In relation to this phenomenon, see Choe (2011, 325). Wasteland between cultivated plots was demonstrated on a rough sketch map made in the early 1900s by an empty area. But all such lands were demarcated and to become part of neighboring parcels in the colonial land survey. As a result, there is no unoccupied space on colonial cadastral maps.

17. The *gwaseji gyeonchwido* did not resolve the disparity in boundary perceptions between Koreans and Japanese at once. Since Korean locals participated in drawing up the sketch

Differences in senses of boundary were also evident in the *Custom Investigation Report* (*Gwanseup josa bogoseo* 慣習調査報告書) compiled by the Japanese colonial government.<sup>18</sup> The Japanese Residency-General (Tonggambu 統監府) had studied the customs of Korean society between 1908 and 1910. For the Japanese, the investigation, which inquired into indigenous social conventions from the perspective of modern law, revealed some unexpected features of Joseon society. For instance, the survey on the appropriation right on land (*hoyugwon* 互有權)<sup>19</sup> drew a simple conclusion:

In Korea, people rarely install demarcation marks, fences, etc. on boundary lines, so ultimately we cannot see the custom of ownership around a boundary. Therefore, there is no custom between neighbors of sharing a border. (Jung 1992, 154)

Japan's question of how to share rights along designated borderlines—the real rights at the border—could not be applied to Joseon society.

The results of a survey of Korean real estate customs conducted in Hwanghae-do province confounded Japanese investigators. As for cases of Koreans making competing claims for ownership along boundary lines, residents in three counties (Eunyul-gun 殷栗郡, Jaeryeong-gun 載寧郡, Songhwa-gun 松禾郡) replied as follows: “I don't know any method since I never heard about arguments over boundary lines.” To the question, “How do you decide when two or more people claim ownership over the same

---

maps, a lot of products did not meet the Japanese standards. Maps drawn by Koreans were too rough, as in the following cases: 1. Several distant plots were drawn together as owned by the same person. 2. Land categories were decided not by actual use, but by major tendency of the surroundings. 3. Barren areas and streams were kept blank. 4. Parcels on both sides of roads were portrayed as a single plot. 5. Small pieces on slopes were omitted, etc. (see Hong [2015, 50]). These cases indirectly reveal the sense of boundary and the perception of land of pre-colonial Korean society.

18. Between May 1908 and September 1910, the Residency-General's Bureau of Law Investigation (Beopjeon josaguk 法典調査局) examined Korean legal customs, compiling its findings into the *Custom Investigation Report* in 1910, 1912, and 1913. For details, see Jung (1992).

19. The appropriation right refers to the right of neighbors to share demarcation marks, fences, walls, etc. along boundary lines.

thing?” people replied that it was determined by documents, or by the opinion of seniors and officials, etc. And there were even such interesting reactions as, “I never heard of any conflict over the land.”<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, border disputes comprised only 0.3 percent (over 307 plots) of the land disputes over the 99,445 plots nationwide in the early 1900s (Y. Shin 1989, 22).<sup>21</sup> This despite the Japanese Government-General’s view that boundaries were unclear and demarcations were vague since there were no maps. The following statement by Tsuchiya Kinoshige 土屋喜之助, who was chief surveyor on the Provisional Land Survey Bureau (Imsi toji josaguk 臨時土地調査局), illustrated this situation.

As you know, there is nothing like a land register in Joseon, but very uncertain documents called *munji* 文記 are used. We might think there must be a lot of disputes over land demarcations, but in fact, there are few conflicts over land ownership or boundaries between Koreans. Occasionally there are border disputes between individuals and the state or between Japanese and Koreans. I have qualms about the current attempts by Japanese to poach on neighboring lands on the plea of ambiguous borderlines.<sup>22</sup>

To summarize, Joseon society recognized a plot of land as comprising the scope of a person’s cultivation and the borders were formed naturally by the land’s surroundings, like ridges and wasteland. In the Joseon period, the boundary was a kind of border zone, not a line. I will refer to this zone as a *buffer zone*. The indigenous sense of boundary took the existence of buffer zones for granted. However, from the perspective of the Japanese, who were seeking to implement the modern concept of boundary, such conceptualizations were too vague and tenuous. They drew a clear line

20. “Chapter 7. Conflicts of Boundaries and Rights,” in the *Report of the Jungchuwon* 中樞院 (The Privy Council), June 1907 (11th year of Emperor Gwangmu), accessed November 13, 2019, [http://db.history.go.kr/id/ju\\_022\\_0080\\_0010\\_0010](http://db.history.go.kr/id/ju_022_0080_0010_0010).

21. There is a possibility that because of the absence of clear borders reconciliation was easily achieved.

22. “Column of Tsuchiya, the Chief Surveyor on the Provisional Land Survey Bureau,” in *Joseon* 朝鮮, vol. 44, page 51, as cited in J. Lee (1955, 42–43).

between lands and gave authority to the borderline itself by making the demarcation function as the official one. But this was the result of misunderstandings of the traditional Korean perception of the boundary.

### **Conclusion: Boundary, Land, and People**

In the modern cadastral system, the way of drawing borders is obvious. First, set a center point (*jungsimjeom* 中心點) and then make control points (*gijunjeom* 基準點) at regular distances. Once the control points are set with different hierarchies, it is time to connect them by beelines. Under the longitude, latitude, and the grid of the beelines, a country's entire territory becomes an object for measurement as real estate. Within the grid, historical features of a site or the individuality of a plot are treated merely as unnecessary *subjective* elements. Every piece of land must be finely and precisely partitioned by *objective* and *scientific* survey techniques. The process of creating a closed curve by connecting points was part of a process of creating immovable estates. Now, a vast expanse of land is divided and broken down into numerous pieces. And in compiling cadastral maps, there are additional divisions of surface: since even a single plot must sometimes be cut into pieces to fit the *standardized* paper size of the official map.

Through this process, the land loses its identity and is classified simply as an object of transaction and consumption, a kind of property. Even if humans are not using that land, its existence becomes worthy (Jang 2010, 122). From this perspective, the price of land is presented as a measure of value. A given territory is densely packed with distinct and immovable estates; some of them may have a low market value, but none of them are without their market price. The price of land is determined not by the specific character of individual parcels, but by the trading price offered by the state.

People in the Joseon period, however, recognized land in the exact opposite way. Once there was a hill of earth and a person. The person's efforts to enrich the soil transformed the hill into a plot. The soil, once touched by human hands, obtains different properties from the sand on

roadsides. After enriching all the land within the sphere of one's labor, the area naturally has special meanings from its surroundings and is demarcated as a plot. As each domain became firmly established, each plot was connected to its neighboring plots. After lines are tightly linked to surroundings, respectively dispersed domains are reborn as a surface. This connection extends outward to encompass all the farmland across the country. Then, the land is formed as a group of plots. There are some spaces between plots, which is where the modern order has tried to draw boundary lines.

In this indigenous sense, land and people were strongly correlated. Land fed people, and people found value in land through its cultivation. Thus, the relationship between land and people was essential and necessary. Within this interaction, boundaries were formed naturally as a kind of buffer zone and they connected nature and humans.

---

## REFERENCES

### Primary Sources

*Chungcheongnam-do Hansan-gun yangan* 忠清南道韓山郡量案 (Gwangmu Land Registers), Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies (奎17672).

*Jijeokwondo* 地籍原圖 (Cadastral Maps) of Secheon-gun County, National Archives of Korea.

*Sejong sillok* 世宗實錄 (Veritable Records of King Sejong).

The Act on the Establishment, Management, etc. of Spatial Data of Korea. Available at, <http://www.law.go.kr/법령/공간정보의구축및관리등에관한법률>.

The Enforcement Regulations on Land Taxation, the 42nd Ordinance of the Government-General, April 21, 1914. Available at, [http://www.law.go.kr/법령/지세령시행규칙/\(00042,19140421\)](http://www.law.go.kr/법령/지세령시행규칙/(00042,19140421)).

The Korean Civil Act. Available at, <http://www.law.go.kr/법령/민법>.

The Report of Jungchuwon 中樞院 (The Privy Council), June 1907. Available at, [http://db.history.go.kr/id/ju\\_022\\_0080\\_0010\\_0010](http://db.history.go.kr/id/ju_022_0080_0010_0010).

*Tojidaejang* 土地臺帳 (Colonial Land Registers) of Seocheon-gun County, Seocheon-

gun County Office.

## Secondary Sources

- Adelman, Jeremy, and Stephen Aron. 1999. "From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in between in North American History." *American Historical Review* 104.3: 814–841.
- Baud, Michiel, and Willem van Schendel. 1997. "Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands." *Journal of World History* 8.2: 211–242.
- Choe, Won-Kyu. 2011. "Ilje chogi Changwon-gun gwaseji gyeonchwido-ui naeyong-gwa seonggyeok" (Content and Nature of Sketch Maps of Changwon-gun in the Early Japanese Colonial Era). *Hanguk minjok munhwa* (Journal of Koreanology) 40: 297–346.
- Gwak, Insun, and Junehwan Koh. 2009. "Pilji gyeonggye-reul segye cheukji jwapyoro byeonhwanhagi wihan bangbeop yeongu" (A Study on the Method of Transforming the Parcel Boundary into the World Geodetic Reference System Coordinate). *Hanguk jijeok hakhoeji* (Journal of the Korean Society of Cadastre) 25.2: 283–300.
- Hong, Keumsoo. 2015. "Jecheon-gun Geunjwa-myeon 'gyeongji baeyeol illamdo'-ui jejak baegyong-gwa saryojeok gachi" (The Significance of the 1911 Estate Maps of Geunjwa-myeon of Jecheon County). *Munhwa yeoksa jiri* (Journal of Cultural and Historical Geography) 27.3: 39–69.
- Jang, Hee-Soon. 2010. "Budong sanhak-eseo 'toji'-ui gaenyeomjeok ihae" (Conceptual Consideration of Land at the Viewpoint of Real Estate Science). *Jugeo hwangyeong* (Journal of the Residential Environment Institute of Korea) 8.1: 117–125.
- Jung, Geungsik. 1992. *Gukyeok gwanseup josa bogoseo* (The Custom Investigation Report Translated in Korean). Seoul: Korea Legislation Research Institute.
- Kang, Dae Sung. 2005. "Toji soyugwon-ui beomwi" (A Limit on Land Ownership). *Toji beophak* (Land Law Review) 21: 153–162.
- Kim, Baeksoo, Yunsoo Choi, and Jongduck Ji. 2005. "Gyeonggye-ga saenghwal-e michineun yeonghyang-e gwanhan gicho yeongu" (A Basic Study on the Impact of the Boundary to Human Life). *Hanguk jijeok hakhoeji* (Journal of the Korean Society of Cadastre) 21.2: 167–180.
- Kim, Haeng Jong. 1998. "Jijeok bulbuhapi-ui wonin-gwa haegyeol bangan yeongu" (A Study on the Improvement and Cause of Non-coincidence Cadastre). *Jiyeok sahoe baljeon hakhoe nonmunjip* (Journal of the Korean Community Development Society) 23.1: 317–344.



- Kim, Jonghyuk. 2003. "Joseon sidae haengjeong guyeok-ui byeondong-gwa bokwon" (Changes in and Reconstruction of Administrative Districts of Joseon Korea). *Munhwa yeoksa jiri* (Journal of Cultural and Historical Geography) 15.2: 97–124.
- Kim, Kuentae. 2018. "Daehan jeguk hojeok-gwa yangan-ui sangho gwallyeonseong" (Correlation between the Household Register and the Land Register in the Korean Empire). *Hanguksaron* (Review of Korean History) 64: 359–385.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2019. "Joseon hugi maeul wisang-gwa jeonseryang-ui gwangye" (Relationship between the Status of Village and the Amount of Land Tax in the Late Joseon Dynasty). *Hanguk saron* (Review of Korean History) 65: 185–226.
- Kim, Taehoon. 1995. "Jisang gyeonggye-ui beomnyuljeok hyoryeok-e gwanhan yeongu" (A Study on the Legal Force of Boundary on the Ground Surface). *Hanguk jijeok hakhoeji* (Journal of the Korean Society of Cadastre) 3.1: 29–40.
- Kwon, Hyuk Jin, Yunsoo Choi, and Jongduck Ji. 2004. "Jijeok bulbu hapji jeongni saeop-ui hyoyuljeok chujinbangan-e gwanhan yeongu" (A Study on Effective Solutions for Cadastral Mismatch Problems). *Hanguk jijeok hakhoeji* (Journal of the Korean Society of Cadastre) 20.2: 147–156.
- Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies of Seoul National University, ed. 2013. *Joseon hugi-daehan jegukgi yangan haeseoljip* (Bibliography of Land Registers in Late Joseon and the Korean Empire Periods). 3 vols. Seoul: Minsokwon.
- Lee, Beomgwan. 1997. "Gyeonggye bunjaeng-ui siltae-wa haegyeol bangan: Daegu gwangyeoksi bunjaeng sarye-reul jungsimeuro" (Actual Conditions of Boundary Disputes and Solutions: Mainly about Dispute Cases in Daegu-gwangyeoksi). *Hanguk jijeok hakhoeji* (Journal of the Korean Society of Cadastre) 13: 127–148.
- Lee, Hyun-Joon. 2008. "Pilji-ui bonjil yeongu" (A Study on the Essence of a Land Parcel). *Hanguk jijeok hakhoeji* (Journal of the Korean Society of Cadastre) 24.1: 121–135.
- Lee, Jaemu. 1955. "Chōsen-ni okeru tochi chōsa jigyo-no jittai" 朝鮮における'土地調査事業'の實體 (The Truth of the Colonial Land Survey in Korea). *Sakai kaigaku kenkyu* (Journal of Social Science) 7.5: 22–58.
- Lee, Sangyoung, and Hyun Kwon. 2012. "Budongsan gaenyeom-e daehan ilgochal" (A Study on the Concept of Real Property). *Bigyobeop yeongu* (Journal of Comparative Law) 12.2: 49–85.
- Lee, Seong-hwa. 2001. "Jijeok bulbuhapji-ga toji iyong-e michineun yeonghyang-gwa haeso bangan-e gwanhan yeongu" (Study on the Impact of Cadastral Non-Coincidence Lands on Land Use and the Solution of It). *Budongsanhak yeongu* (Journal of the Korea Real Estate Analysts Association) 7.2: 53–72.

- Lee, You-Jin. 2019. "Daehan jegukgi hogu byeondong-ui uimi: Pyeonganbuk-do Jeongju-gun Haesan-myeon hojeokdaejang-gwa mokjang yangan bigyo bunseok" (Interpretation of the Fluctuation of Households from the Household Registers of the Korean Empire, 1899–1900). *Hangukhak yeongu* (Journal of Korean Studies) 53: 39–65.
- Lee, Young-Hak. 2011. "1910-nyeondae Gyeongsangnam-do Gimhae-gun gogyuji silcheukdo-wa gwaseji gyeonchwido-ui bigyo" (Comparison Between a Surveyed Map of State Land and an Index Map for the Taxable Lands in Gimhae County, Southern Gyeongsang Province in the 1910s). *Hangukhak yeongu* (Journal of Korean Studies) 24: 53–86.
- Nam, Eui-Hyeon. 2012. "Gojido-reul tonghaeseo bon 15-17segi-ui byeongyeong jidae: Amnokgang, Dumangang byeon-eul jungsimeuro" (Looking at the Frontier from the Fifteenth to Seventeenth Centuries through Old Maps: Focusing on the Banks of the Yalu and Tumen Rivers). *Manju yeongu* (Journal of Manchurian Studies) 14: 37–73.
- Shin, Gookmi. 2014. "Jijeok bulbuhapji-ui beopjeok jaengjeom: Gyeonggye hwakjeong-e subandoeneun je munje-reul jungsimeuro" (The Legal Issue on Cadastral Inconsistency Land: Focusing on the Problems Accompanying Land Demarcation). *Hanguk jijeok jeongbo hakhoeji* (Journal of the Korean Cadastre Information Association) 16.3: 81–93.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2016. "Jijeokdo sang-ui gyeonggye-wa hyeonsil gyeonggye-ga sangwihan toji-ui soyugwon beomwi" (A Study on the Range of Land Ownership in the Case of the Existence of Differences between Map-based Land Boundary and Actual Land Boundary). *Ilgam beophak* (Ilkam Law Review) 33: 209–243.
- Shin, Yong-Ha. 1989. "3-1 undong-ui sahoe-gyeongjejeok baegyong" (Socio-economic Background of the March First Independence Movement). *Guksagwan nonchong* (Journal of National Institute of Korean History) 1: 1–36.
- Song, Yong Deok. 2005. "Goryeo jeongi gukgyeong jiyeok-ui jujinseong pyeonje" (The Ju·Jin-based Fortress System of the Border Area in the Early Goryeo Dynasty). *Hanguksaron* (Review of Korean History) 51: 85–160.
- Winichakul, Thongchai. 1994. *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-body of a Nation*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.