

Reorienting *Reorient*: East Asia and 15th-19th Century Joseon

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Abstract

This paper examines A. G. Frank's views about 15th-19th Korea (Joseon Dynasty) in his Reorient. A. G. Frank recognized that Korea might have played a great role in the international relations of East Asia, but he did not write systematically about it and he did not treat Korea as an independent player in the history of East Asia. I think the greatest limitation to his re-interpretation of East Asia is in that he depends too much on China's and Japan's perspective.

In order to overcome Frank's shortcomings regarding the history of Korea, first I examine what Frank recognized about the Joseon dynasty between 1400 and 1800. Next I compare Joseon's development to that of China and Japan between 1400 and 1800. Frank compared Europe and East Asia (mainly China and Japan) from three aspects of quantities (population, production, productivity, and trade), qualities (science and technology), and mechanism (economic and financial institutions).

With this research we insist that Joseon should not be dismissed in 15th-19th East Asia. The reasons are as follows. First, Joseon between 1400 and 1800 had developed economically as much as China and Japan. Second, Joseon had played a great role in connecting China and Japan and had a positive influence on the development of Japan. So we need to reappraise Reorient's view about East Asia. Only when role of Joseon can be correctly

estimated, the dynamics and diversity of East Asia can be properly understood.

Key words

A.G. Frank, Reorient, Joseon Dynasty, East Asia, triangle trade

I. INTRODUCTION

Many scholars have questioned Euro-centric world history and the “modernity” of Europe itself. Some scholars see “modernity as the joint creation of many parts of the globe.”¹ In this process, the history of the non-West such as that of East Asia, Islam and Africa has been reinterpreted and reemphasized. Specifically the “early modern age” of China in East Asia has been elucidated by many western scholars.² But the “the early modern age” of Korea has not yet become a hot issue among western scholars. Reappraisal of Korean “early modern” history is important for two reasons. One is that the systematic research of the pre-industrialized history of Korea is helpful to throw light on the historical background and the peculiarity of the rapid industrialization of current Korea.³ Another is that the new and positive reinterpretation of the history of Korea is useful to seeing the history of East Asia in diversity.

So we need to reappraise the existing views that deal with the status and the role of Joseon 朝鮮 Dynasty (1392-1910, in Korea) in East Asia. Here I will look carefully at A. G. Frank’s views about Joseon in his *Reorient*.⁴ A. G. Frank recognized that Korea

¹ Kenneth Pomeranz, “Teleology, Discontinuity and World History: Periodization and Some Creation Myths of Modernity,” *Asian Review of World Histories* 1, no. 2 (July 2013): 202.

² A. G. Frank, *Reorient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Bin Wong, *China Transformed Historical Changes and the Limits of the European Experience* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); A. G. Frank, *Reorienting the 19th Century: Global Economy in the Continuing Asian Age* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Pub, 2014).

³ Kang Sungho and Ramon Grosfoguel, eds., *Geopolitics and Trajectories of Development: the Cases of Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Germany and Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asia Studies, Univ. of California-Berkeley, 2011), 90.

⁴ After I examined here A. G. Frank’s views about Joseon in his *Reorient*, I will look

might have played a great role in the international relations of East Asia, but he didn't write systematically about it and he didn't treat Korea as an independent entity in the history of East Asia. I think that his limitation is in that he re-interpreted East Asia mainly in the perspective of China and Japan.

In order to overcome Frank's limitation about the history of Korea, first I will concretely examine what Frank recognized about the Joseon dynasty between 1400 and 1800. Next, I will examine whether Joseon had developed similar to China and Japan between 1400 and 1800. Frank compared Europe and East Asia (mainly China and Japan) from three aspects of quantities (population, production, productivity, and trade), qualities (science and technology), and mechanism (economic and financial institutions).

Here I will examine Joseon between 1400-1800 from the perspective of quantities (population, production, productivity, and trade). With this research I will insist that Joseon should not be dismissed in 15th-19th East Asia. When the role of Joseon can be rightly estimated, the dynamics and diversity of East Asia can be more properly understood.

II. A. G. FRANK'S *REORIENT* AND JOSEON

1. A. G. Frank's Global History

A. G. Frank began to analyze the relationship of the underdevelopment of Latin America and world capitalism since the early 1960s. He had analyzed the underdevelopment of Latin America in the perspective of the euro-centric theory of dependency until the late 1980s. He had started to rethink his existing euro-centric view, debating with Janet Abu-Lughod who insisted on 'the

at also Frank's views about Joseon in his *Reorienting the 19th Century*.

world system in the thirteenth century.⁵ Then he tried to make his own perspective of ‘the global history,’ criticizing the euro-centric interpretation of Immanuel Wallerstein and Fernand Braudel.⁶ He suggested that the world economy and the world system were not formed around Europe but that Europe was late in the world economy and the world system.

Frank also criticized the euro-centrism of Marx and Marxist historians.⁷ According to him, Marx’s comparative method suffered from “inadequate holism and misplaced concreteness” and some “features” that he declared to be “essential” were wanting everywhere except in Europe.⁸ He also criticized that Marxist historians such as Maurice Dobb, Paul Sweezy, Robert Brenner, and Perry Anderson didn’t escape from European exceptionalism. According to him, Marxist economic historians look for the sources of “the Rise of the West” and “the development of capitalism” within Europe.⁹ Frank insisted that this euro-centric view of Marxism was “Orientalism painted red,” depending on Teshale Tibebu.¹⁰

In 1998 Frank published *Reorient* which analyzed the world economy between 1400 and 1800. First, he urged that the core of the world economy between 1400 and 1800 was not Europe but Asia, especially China.¹¹ Second, he thought that Europe could rise as a new center of the world economy because Europe had the advantage of “backwardness” afforded by their position at the (semi-)periphery of the world economy.¹² Third, he paid attention to the economic revival in and the world impact of East Asia (Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore) and forecast that “the West and the East will again trade places in the

⁵ A. G. Frank, “Comment on Janet Abu-Lughod’s ‘The Shape of the World System in the Thirteenth Century,’” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 22, no. 4 (1987): 35-37.

⁶ Frank, *Reorient*, 42.

⁷ Kang Sungho, “A. G. Frank-ui Segyechejeron-guwa Marxism (A. G. Frank’s World System Theory and Marxism),” *Marxism Yeongu* (Marxism Studies) 1, no. 2 (2005): 202-3.

⁸ Frank, *Reorient*, 324.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁰ Teshale Tibebu, “On the Question of Feudalism, Absolutism, and the Bourgeois Revolution,” *Review*, 13, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 83-85.

¹¹ Frank, *Reorient*, 354.

¹² *Ibid.*, 283.

global economy and in world society."¹³

Frank insists that we need a more "holistic perspective" of the history of world. He criticized that both "national" histories and "societal" histories, plus the view of the history of the world based on an Islamic-centered world system, Afro-centrism and a China-centered tribute trade system was too limited. According to him, all the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle put together couldn't reveal the whole, "since the whole is more than the sum of its parts."¹⁴ He thought that "only a holistic universal, global, world history can offer the historiographical basis for a better social theory."¹⁵ He suggested that the micro-history and the macro-history be related to each other. According to him, as the "micro" demand-and-supply hypothesis and the long-cycle "macro" hypothesis need to be systemically related to each other, they need to require "a marriage of real micro-and macro-history (including ecological history) to provide a real basis for the equation History=Theory for the world as a whole."¹⁶

He thinks that commonality is more important than differences. He criticizes the stock-in-trade of historians that "identify and stress the specific and unique particularistic features of every 'civilization,' 'culture,' or 'society' and their respective historical processes and events."¹⁷ According to him, in early modern world history, "commonalities are both more common and more important than the real differences," not to mention the many alleged differences that are not even real."¹⁸ He stresses that only "a holistic perspective on and from the global whole that is more than the sum of its parts can offer any adequate comprehension of any one part and how and why it differs from any other."¹⁹ He does not deny diversity, mentioning "unity in diversity." He rec-

¹³ Ibid., 320.

¹⁴ Ibid., 339.

¹⁵ Ibid., 340.

¹⁶ Ibid., 350.

¹⁷ Ibid., 341.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 342.

ognizes that “unity itself generates and continually changes diversity” and “diversity must be tolerated and could be appreciated in unity”²⁰

Frank also emphasizes the importance of “the globally horizontal history.” He pleaded in 1978 that “the essential (because it is both the most necessary and the least accomplished) contribution of the historian to historical understanding is successively to relate different things and places at the same time in the historical process.”²¹ So he agrees with Fletcher who criticizes the historians that are blind to “horizontal histories.”

Frank’s new approach to this “global world history” may be a great step toward overcoming the existing eurocentric world history. But there are several obstacles for Frank’s global world history becoming an alternative.²² First, he neglects concrete research on certain important times and regions or countries, emphasizing “the holistic and universal global history.” He does not recognize the difference between the pre-modern world system and the modern world system, insisting on the continuity of a 5000 year long world system. He dismisses the history of Korea that was one among three major countries of East Asia and his description of East Asia becomes basically incomplete.

Second, he tends not to pay enough attention to the internal historical mechanisms and differences of certain regions and certain countries, stressing the external relationships and the globally horizontal connection between parts and parts of world. He does not analyze the internal reason why modern industrialization did not occur in other regions outside Europe while he urges to see the process of European industrialization in relation to the exiting world market. Also, he looks at only China and Japan in East Asia. This is because he cannot see East Asia as “a historical mini-system” that has developed dynamically according to the internal development and interaction of three major East Asian countries such as Korea, China and Japan.

²⁰ Ibid., 1-2.

²¹ A. G. Frank, *World Accumulation, 149-1789* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press and Macmillan Press, 1978), 21.

²² Kang, “A. G. Frank’s World System Theory and Marxism,” 201; Kang Sungho, “Andre Gunder Frank-ui ‘Jeonjigujeok’ Segyechejeron (A. G. Frank’s ‘Global’ World System Theory),” *Yeoksabipyong* (Critical Review of History) 82 (2008).

Third, it is a reflection of the existing Eurocentric interpretation of East Asia for Frank to see East Asia focusing on only China and Europe which have a direct trade relation with Europe. Eurocentric historians tend to describe mainly the regions and countries that have a direct relationship with Europe in the perspective of Europe. His underestimation of the role of Joseon in East Asia and the world doesn't escape the trap of Eurocentrism. This is because Joseon did not have a direct contact with Europe. Frank should have seen Korea and East Asia not in the perspective of Europe but in that of East Asia itself.

To overcome Frank's theoretical limitations, I will examine the limitation of Frank's recognition of Joseon and re-estimate the history of Joseon between 1400 and 1800 in relation to Frank's *Reorient*. This approach may contribute not only to illuminate Joseon in the world system between 1400 and 1800 but also to overcome the methodological limitation of *Reorient*.

2. *Reorient* and 15th-19th Century Joseon

Frank acknowledges that the history of Korea has been dismissed in spite of the fact that Korea is as important as China and Japan in the history of East Asia. He notes that the monetary and economic history of Korea has been ignored compared to that of its neighbors and the world economy.²³ He thinks that Korea was not isolated from the world economy and could not be defined as 'feudalism.'²⁴ He confesses that he does not sufficiently mention the history of Korea while describing the world economy and Asian Economy between 1400 and 1800.²⁵

Frank's description of Joseon is very insufficient. He does not sufficiently describe Joseon in an independent entity and mentions Korea only in relation to Japan and China. He knows

²³ Frank, *Reorient*, 237.

²⁴ A. G. Frank, "Korean Edition Preface," *Reorient* (Seoul: Isan, 2003), 18.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

that Korea had an excellent military (“firearms, fortress, standing armies, and warships”) like China and Japan before the 16th Century, citing Geoffrey Parker's description of guns in East Asia.²⁶ He also notes that “movable metal type came from Korea and was soon introduced elsewhere, though not into the Islamic world for a long time.”²⁷

Frank mentions that Joseon had trade relations with China and Japan. His descriptions of international trade between Korea and Japan in the 17th century are contradictory. On one hand, he cites Nicolas Tarling's opinion that Japanese trade was maintained “only through the tightly controlled Dutch and Chinese trade at Nagasaki.”²⁸ Here he indirectly ignored the role of Korea in international trade in East Asia. On the other hand, he recognizes that Korea had an important role in trade with Japan. Depending on Satoshi Ikeda, he writes that trade between Korea and Japan was important: “silk imports via Korea and the Ryukyus sometimes exceeded those via Nagasaki.”²⁹ He cites Stephen K. Sanderson's decision that “trade with China and Korea became an important part of the Japanese economy.”³⁰ I think that trade between the two countries was important in 17th century East Asia. I will take this up in detail in chapter 4.

Frank tries to understand Joseon in the Chino-centric tribute system of East Asia. His approach to East Asia is based mainly on the research results of Takeshi Hamashita, Mark Selden, Giovanni Arrighi, and Satoshi Ikeda (studies of the history of East Asia). He comments specifically on Hamashita's economic tribute system theory. According to Hamashita, the Chinese tribute trade system was based on the Ming and Qing institutional codes that distinguished and ranked geographical groupings of “tributaries.”

²⁶ Frank, *Reorient*, 196.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 200.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 106.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 107.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 105.

III. DIDN'T JOSEON DEVELOP?

There are three main theories to explain the Joseon dynasty between 1400 and 1800. First is the theory of stagnation - Joseon could not develop at all. Second is the theory of colonial industrialization—Joseon developed not in quality but in quantity until the late 18th century or the late 19th century when the modern industrialization of Korea was created by imperial Japan.³¹ Third is the theory of internal development—Joseon developed rapidly especially during 17th-18th century, then to the late 18th century or the mid-19th century.³²

No one insists on the theory of stagnation because many historical documents show us that Joseon developed in quantity or in quality. There is controversy between the theory of colonial industrialization and the theory of internal development. Both agree that Joseon developed until the late 18th century or the early 19th century.³³ There are three issues about the two theories: differentiation of peasantry, proto-industrialization and character of the late Joseon state.

I support theory of internal development. First, this theory insists that differentiation of peasantry in the late Joseon period resulted in the upper class peasants (landlords and rich peasants)

³¹ Rhee Young-Hoon, "Hanguksa-e Iseoseo Keundae-ro-ui Ihaeng-kwa Teukjil (Characteristic of Transition to the Modern Age in the Korean History)," *Kyeongje Sahak* (Economic History) 21 (1996); Rhee Young-Hoon and Park Itaek, "18 Segi Joseon Wangjo-ui Gyeonjecheje (The Economic System of the 18th Century Joseon Dynasty)," *Keundae Dongasia Kyeongje-ui Yeoksajeok Kujo* (Historical Structure of Modern Economy in East Asia) (Seoul: Iljogak, 2007); Carter J. Eckert, *Offspring of Empire* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991).

³² Kim Yongseop, "Na-ui Hanguk Nongyeopsa Yeongu Hoigo (Retrospection to My Research to the Agricultural History of Korea)," *Yeoksahakbo* (Journal of History) 180 (2003); Kang Mangil, "Joseon Hugi Sangeop Jabon-ui Seongjang (The Development of Commercial Capital in the Late Joseon Dynasty)," *Hanguksa Yeongu* (Study of Korean History) 1 (1968); Choi Yoon-Oh, "Joseon Hugi Saho Kyeongjesa Yeongu-wa Keundae (The Modern Age and Research of Economic History in the Late Joseon Dynasty)," *Yeoksa-wa Hyeonsil* (History and Reality) 45 (2002).

³³ Ree Young-Hoon, "19 Segi Joseon Wangjo Kyeongjechejeui Wigi (The Crisis of Economic System in the 19th Century Joseon Dynasty)," *Joseon Sidae Sahakbo* (Journal of the History of Joseon Dynasty) 43 (2007): 289.

and lower class peasants (small peasants and ruined peasants).³⁴ I agree with the process of ‘upward’ differentiation of peasantry, because this depended on research and analysis about the wider rural area than ‘downward’ differentiation of peasantry.³⁵ Second, Hwangok 還穀, the state grain redistribution system of the 17th-18th Joseon was greater than that of Qing China. Young-Hoon Rhee insists that this system based on the Confucian ideology such as ‘equilibrium’ and ‘stability’ and the late Joseon was a pre-modern moral economy.³⁶ We need to think that social demands to relax the tension of class resulting from the ‘upward’ differentiation of peasants was a political economic background of ‘moral economy.’³⁷ Third, the concept of ‘proto-industrialization’ needs to be used more widely in the late Joseon society.³⁸ Although agricultural industry in the late Joseon didn’t develop as it did in England,³⁹ the mining industry and the handicraft manufacturing industry were led by the Joseon government.

1. Increase of Agricultural Productivity in 15th-19th Century Joseon

In early Joseon, Agricultural Production increased continuously.⁴⁰ Peasants used a variety of fertilizers to improve the fertility of the land. The method of transplanting rice seedlings had become known in some areas, and efforts to develop strains of seed better adapted to the Korean climate were exerted. This improvement in agricultural technology resulted in increased yields.

Agricultural production developed rapidly in the 17th-18th

³⁴ Choi, “Modern Age and Research of Economic History,” 46.

³⁵ Rhee Young-Hoon, “Joseon Hugi-Irae Sonong Sahoi-ui Jeongae-wa uiui (Development of the Peasantry since the Late Joseon Dynasty),” *Yeoksa-wa Hyeonsil* (History and Reality) 45 (2002).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 24-25; Rhee and Park, “The Economic System of the 18th Century Joseon Dynasty), 9.

³⁷ Choi, “Modern Age and Research of Economic History,” 54.

³⁸ Choi Yoon-Oh, “Joseon Hugi Sahoi Byeondong-kwa Keundae-ro-ui Ihaeng-Naejaejeok Baljeonron-ui Yeoksa Insik (Transition to the Modern Age and Changes in the Late Joseon Dynasty),” *Naeil eul yeoneun Yeoksa* (History for Tomorrow), (2005), 187.

³⁹ Rhee and Park, “The Economic System of the 18th century Joseon Dynasty), 3.

⁴⁰ Lee Hochul, “Nonggeop-gwa Nonggeopgisul (Agriculture and Agricultural Techniques),” *Hanguksa* (History of Korea) 24 (Seoul: Kuksapyeonchanyiweonhoi, 1994), 116-17.

century.⁴¹ The technique of transplanting rice seedlings began to spread rapidly from mid-17th century and was widely used in most of southern Korea. The technique of transplanting rice seedlings made the double-cropping system used intensively and resulted in a remarkable increase in agricultural production. The technique of transplanting rice seedlings greatly reduced the amount of labor required. The furrow-seeding method of cultivating dry-fields also greatly reduced labor required.

As a consequence the farmer could cultivate much larger area of land and the practice called 'enlarged scale farming (kwangjak 廣作),' the phenomenon of a peasant working a good sized area of land by himself became common. Then the richer peasants who succeeded in farming emerged and became agricultural entrepreneurs, producing for the market as well as for their own consumption.

At the same time, commercial production of specialized crops developed: ginseng, tobacco, and cotton. Ginseng was exported to China. So, a new class emerged – that of commoner landlord (peasant farmers who accumulated wealth through increased production that resulted from advance in agricultural technology).

2. Increase of Population

We cannot assume accurately but can outline generally the growth of population during this period. There was a census taken regularly by the Joseon Government. Although this census

⁴¹ Lee Yeonghak, "Nongeop Saengsanryeok-ui Paldal-gwa Sangpumjakmul-ui Jaebae (The Development of Agricultural Productivity and Cultivation of Commercial Crops)," *Hanguksa* (History of Korea) 33 (Seoul: Kuksapyeongchanyiwonhoi, 1997), 33-36; Kim Yongseop, *Jeungbopan Joseon Hugi Nongeopsa Yeongu I – Nongchon Gyeongje Saho Byeondong* (A Research on the Agricultural History in the Late Joseon Dynasty I, enl. ed.) (Seoul: Jisik Saneopsa, 1995); Kim Yongseop, *Sinjungjeungbopan Joseon Hugi Nongeopsa Yeongu II – Nongeop-gwa Nongepnon-ui Byeondon* (A Research on the Agricultural History in the Late Joseon Dynasty II, enl. ed.) (Seoul: Iljogak, 1990, 2004).

cannot be regarded as accurate, it gives some idea of the growth of population during this period. According to the census, the population of Joseon was 3.3 million in 1519. There was no record during 1543-1639 because of two wars with Japan and Qing China. The population diminished to 1.5 million in 1639 and increased again to 6.4 million in 1711 and to 7.9 million in 1813. In 1813 the population began to diminish. It was down to 6.6 million in 1891. Looking at this census, we cannot believe in rapid growth of population between 1639 and 1711. We can suppose this rapid growth of population reflects an effort to fill an administrative vacuum resulting from wars.⁴²

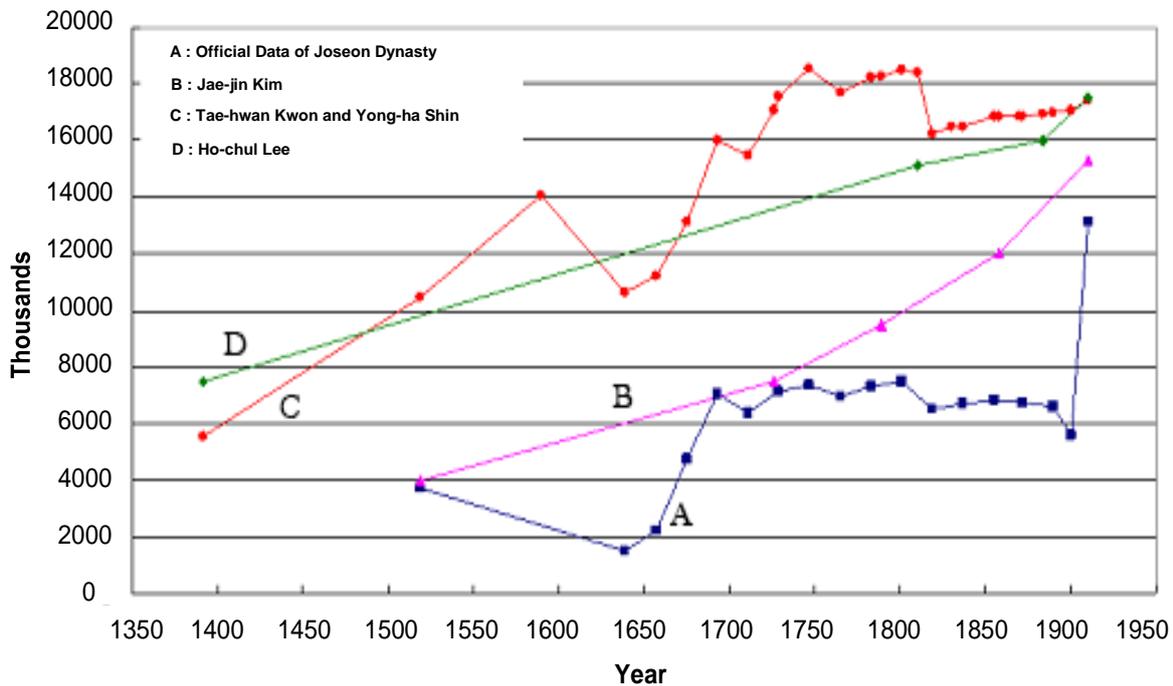
Research was done to supplement this census. There are three main views about the growth of population in the Joseon period. First, according to Jae-jin Kim, the population of Joseon was 4 million in 1510, 7.5 million in 1726, 9.5 million in 1789, 12 million in 1858, and 15.3 million in 1910.⁴³ Second, according to Taehwan Kwon and Yong-ha Shin, the population of Joseon was 5.5 million in 1392, 10.4 million in 1519, 14 million in 1590, 10.6 million in 1639 (decrease resulting from war), 18.3 million in 1810.⁴⁴ Third, according to Ho-chul Lee, the population of Joseon was 7.5 million in 1392, 15.1 million in 1810, 16 million in 1884, 17.5 million in 1910.⁴⁵

⁴² Han Youngguk, "Ingu-ui Jeungga-wa Bunpo (The Increase and Spread of Population)," *Hanguksa (History of Korea)* 33 (Seoul: Kuksapyeonchanyiweonhoi, 1997), 14.

⁴³ Kim Jaejin, *Hanguk-ui Hogu-wa Gyeongje Baljeon* (The Economic Development and Population in Korea) (Seoul: Pakyeongsa, 1967).

⁴⁴ Kweon Taehwan and Sin Yongha, "Joseon Wangjo Sidae Ingu Chujeong-e kwanhan Il-Siron (Speculation to Population of Joseon Dynasty)," *Donga Munhwa* (Donga Culture) 14 (1997).

⁴⁵ Lee Hochul, *Joseon Jeongi Nonggeop Gyeonjesa* (A History of Agricultural Economy in the Early Joseon) (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1986); Lee Hochul, *Nonggeop Gyeongjesa Yeongu* (A Research to History of Agricultural Economy) (Daegu: Kyeongbukdae Chulpanbu, 1992).

Graph 1. Population Growth of Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910)

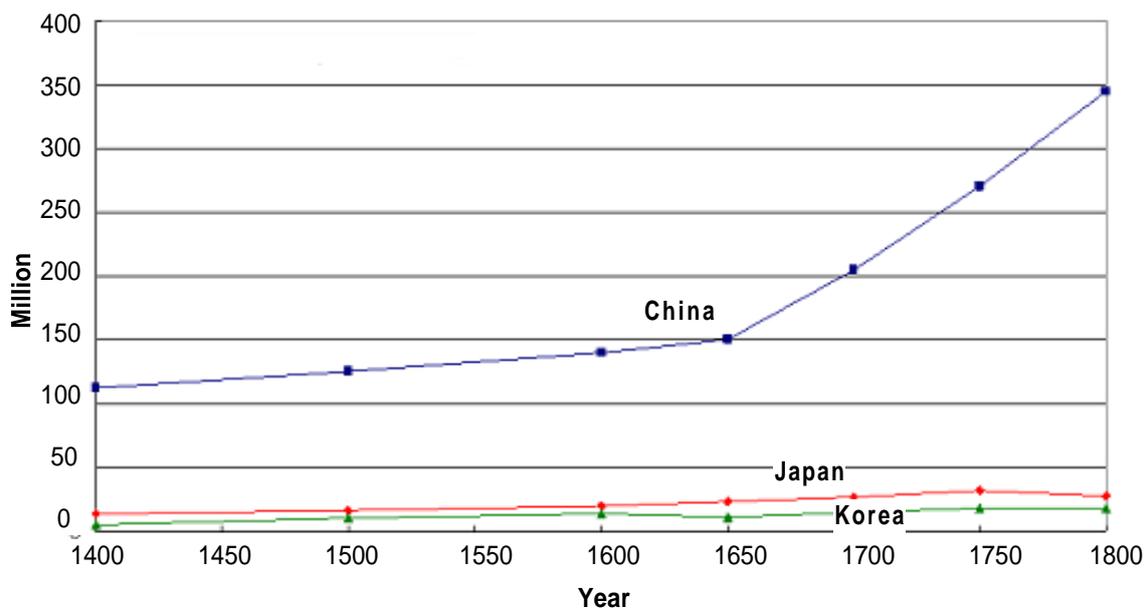
There are differences between these views. But all of these views agree that the population of Joseon increased from 15th century to 19th century. According to the census of the Joseon government, population increased 2.1 times from 3.7 million in 1519 to 7.9 million in 1813. According to Jae-jin Kim, the population increased 2.4 times from 4 million in 1510 to 9.5 million in 1789. According to Tae-hwan Kwon and Yong-ha Shin, the population increased 3.3 times from 5.5 million in 1392 to 18.3 million in 1810. According to Ho-chul Lee, the population increased 2 times from 7.5 million in 1392 to 15.1 million in 1810. This shows us that the population of Joseon increased between 2 times and 3.3 times.

According to these views, we can say the population of Joseon increased similar to the population growth in China and Japan during this period. According to "Table 4.1 World and Regional Population Growth,"⁴⁶ the population of China increased

⁴⁶ Frank, *Reorient*, 168.

3 times from 112 million in 1400 to 345 million in 1800, and population of Japan increased 2 times from 14 million in 1400 to 28 million in 1800.

Graph 2. East Asian Population Growth



The increasing population created a need for more land use. This would have been solved through the development of agricultural productivity. The increased population had led to new agricultural production standards. The manorial system of the first half of the Joseon dynasty gradually changed into the 50-50 sharecropping system in the 17th-18th century. The rapid population growth also produced a large number of propertyless farm laborers. These changes induced the disintegration of traditional social institutions and political structure in the late Joseon dynasty.⁴⁷

3. Increase of Commerce and Development of Cities

In early Joseon, the commerce of Seoul and the local area did not

⁴⁷ Lee Young-Gu and Yu Byung-gyu, "Joseon Jeongi-ui Ingu-wa Nonggeop Saengsanryeok Yeongu (Agricultural Productivity and Population in the Early Joseon Dynasty)," *Nongeopsa Yeongu* (Studies to Agricultural History) 3, no. 2 (2004): 59.

develop because the Confucian government bureaucrats had prejudice against commerce. This had a negative effect on international trade and the domestic economy.⁴⁸ Official government policy permitted only two forms of commercial activity: the tribute contractors and government-licensed merchants. The government tried in this way to limit commercial activities (to a minimum). With commercial activities in Joseon conducted in this fashion, a money economy could not easily develop.

In the 17th-18th century, the activities of private merchants were becoming more evident in Seoul and throughout the country. Their activities were not limited to the area of their base of operations but extended along the major transportation routes to markets everywhere.⁴⁹ For example, the river merchants of Seoul marketed their grain, salt, and fish all along the reaches of the Han River in Kyonggi 京畿 and Chungchong 忠清 provinces. Again, the merchants of Kaesung in Kyonggi province extended their activities over land routes to the Hwanghae 黃海 and Pyongan 平安 regions in the north and into Chungchong and Kyongsang 慶尙 provinces in the south. In all of these areas they established branches as "Kaesung Shops."

As the activities of private merchants grew in scale, the appearance of Seoul's commercial streets also changed. With the exception of the original Six Licensed Stores 六矣廛 themselves, the special privileges granted to the licensed merchants were entirely abolished in 1791, a measure known as the "commercial equalization" enactment. In this new situation three great markets operated by private merchants developed and flourished in Seoul. These three markets traded not only the products of every corner of Korea but goods from China and Japan as well. In this process, the population of Seoul increased from 96 thousand in 1648 to 205 thousand in 1807.

⁴⁸ You Weongdon, "Sangeop (Commerce)", *Hanguksa* (History of Korea) 24 (Seoul: Kuksapyeonchanyiweonhoi, 1994), 121.

⁴⁹ Ko Donghwan, "Sangpum-ui Youtong(Circulation of Commodities), *Hanguksa* (History of Korea) 33 (Seoul: Kuksapyeonchanyiweonhoi, 1997), 377-78.

Markets in the countryside also underwent much development during this period. Markets existed at over a thousand locations in Korea in the eighteenth century, and the larger ones already had been established on a permanent basis. Expanded commercial activity necessitated wider use of metal currency. Following the minting in 1678 of the coins known as “ever-constant treasure”(sangpyeon tongbo 常平通寶), large quantities of coins continued to be issued, and by around the end of the seventeenth century coins were in use throughout the whole country.

IV. 15TH -19TH JOSEON IN EAST ASIA

Historically Korea mediated between China and Japan in East Asia. Before 1400, the Silla 新羅 Kingdom and the Goryeo 高麗 Dynasty played a great role in the triangle trade of East Asia. Korea carried Buddhism, Chinese character, Confucianism, ‘movable metal types’, and silver and porcelain skills into Japan.

Foreign trade policy of the early Joseon was not economic but rather diplomatic.⁵⁰ A new regime of Joseon sought to have stable international relations with neighboring countries in order to strengthen the internal structure of the nation. So the Joseon Dynasty made efforts to maintain a friendly relationship with neighboring countries, Ming China, Yejin in Manchuria (that later established Qing China), Japan, and Ryuku.

The foreign trade of Joseon belonged to the chino-centric tribute system of East Asia. The diplomatic status of Joseon was lower than that of China, but was higher than Japan, Yejin and Ryuku in this chino-centric system. Joseon mediated between China and Japan. The Joseon government dispatched three regular embassies to China each year. The purpose of all these missions was chiefly political, but they also served as the medium for cultural borrowing and economic exchange. Covert private trade accompanied the official ‘tribute’ trade. Articles exported to China by Joseon included horses, ginseng, furs, ramie cloth,

⁵⁰ Weon Youhan, “Muyeok (Trade),” *Hanguksa* (History of Korea) 24 (Seoul: Kuksapyeongchanyiwonhoi, 1994), 207.

and straw mats with floral designs, while in return Joseon obtained silk fabrics, medicine, books, and porcelain ware from China.⁵¹ Thus the relationship with China proceeded satisfactorily on the whole.⁵²

Joseon's foreign trade with Japan proceeded similarly in a 'tribute' trade system. Japan, especially Tsushima dispatched regular missions to Joseon Korea. Covert private trade also accompanied the official 'tribute' trade between Joseon and Japan. Three ports were opened to them along the southeast coast of Korea at Naeipo (Ungcheon 熊川), Pusanpo (Tongnae 東來), and Yeompo Ulsan 蔚山. Trading and living quarters Waegwan 倭館 were established in each to enable the Japanese to conduct their business. Items exported to Japan in this period were necessities such as rice and other grains, cotton, hemp and ramie cloth; also handcrafted articles like mother-of-pearl inlay, porcelain ware, and floral design mats. Cultural items were also involved in trade. These included Confucian writings, histories, temple bells and Buddhist images, and these all made considerable impact on Japanese culture. In exchange the Japanese offered minerals, such as silver, copper and tin as well as luxury items for yangban (nobles of Joseon) consumption such as medicines and spices.

The merchants in the 17th-18th century were active not only in Korea but in foreign trade as well.⁵³ In particular, the merchants of Uiju 義州 (near China) carried on private trade with the Chinese at islands sites in mid river and at the "palisade settlement" of Feng-huang 鳳凰城 well inside Manchuria. At Tongnae, too, near Japan, merchants dealt privately with Japan. Somewhat later a triangle trade developed with the merchants of Kaesung 開城, Uiju and Tongnae serving as middlemen in trans-

⁵¹ Kim Seonmin, "Ginseng and Border Trespassing between Qing China and Joseon Korea," *Late Imperial China* 28, no.1 (June 2007): 33-61.

⁵² Weon, "Trade," 203.

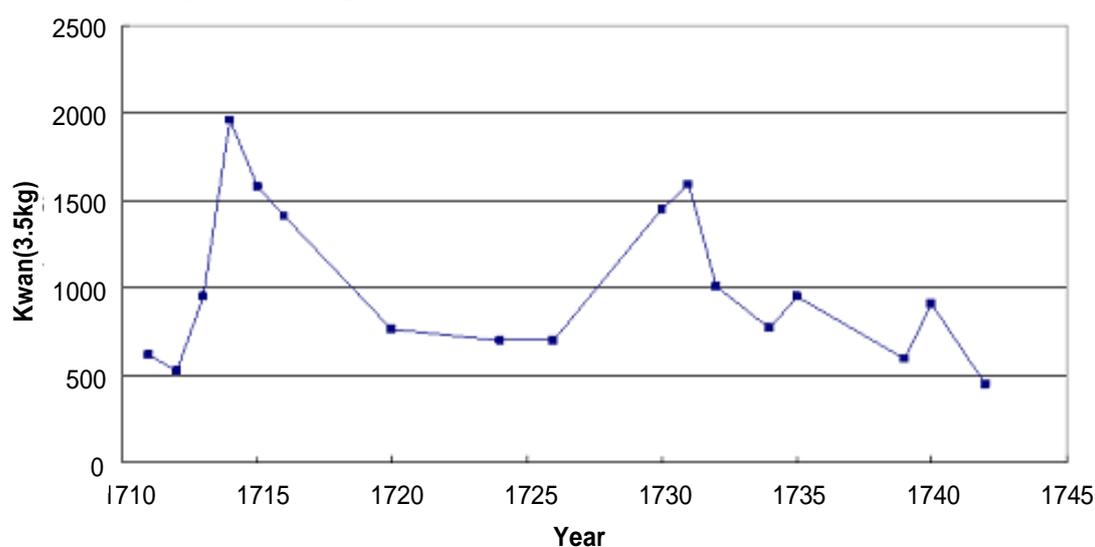
⁵³ Mangil, "Development of Commercial Capital in the Late Joseon Dynasty"; Lee Chulsung, *Joseon Hugi Daecheongmuyeoksa Yeongu* (Trade between Qing China and the Joseon Korea) (Seoul: Gukhakjaryoweon, 2000).

actions involving Korean ginseng, Chinese Silk, and Japanese Copper and Silver.

The scale of trade between Joseon and Japan was great. The annual private trade between the two countries during 1684 – 1710 amounted to 160 thousand kwan (1 kwan=3.75 kg).⁵⁴ The value of 160 thousand kwan comes to 6,000 kwan in silver (6,000 kwan * 3.75 kg=22,500 kg=22.5 ton). 6,000 kwan in silver is 50 times larger than the trade quota between Japan and Ryuku (120 kwan in silver), 2 times larger than the trade quota between Japan and the Netherlands (3,000 kwan in silver), and as large as a trade quota between Japan and China (6,000 kwan in silver).

Silver played an important role in the international trade of East Asia. While silver was smuggled from Joseon to Japan the mid fifteenth century, such flows of silver were reversed by the mid-sixteenth century.⁵⁵ From 1542 Japan could export a large quantity of silver to Joseon because new silver skills from Joseon made Japan produce more silver.⁵⁶ According to official trade records of the Joseon government, 112, 371 kwan in silver (421 ton in silver) was imported from Japan between 1710 and 1742. Joseon used this silver to buy Chinese commodities.

Graph 3. Silver Export from Japan to Korea



⁵⁴ Jung Seongil, “Daeoi Muyeok-ui Jeongae (Development of Foreign Trade),” *Hanguksa* (History of Korea) 33 (Seoul: Kuksapyeongchanyiwonhoi, 1997), 360.

⁵⁵ Dennis O. Flynn and Marie A. Lee, “East Asian Trade before/after 1590s Occupation of Korea: Modeling Imports and Exports in Global Context,” *Asian Review of World Histories* 1, no.1 (January 2013): 131.

⁵⁶ Jung, “Development of Foreign Trade,” 472.

The triangle trade of Joseon between China and Japan began to diminish in 1685 year that Qing China removed control on foreign sea trade. In 1685 Japan began to trade directly with China. Furthermore in the late 1730s the Japanese government restrained silver exports, and international trade between Joseon and Japan fell into deep stagnancy.⁵⁷

Triangle international trade between China, Joseon and Japan in East Asia between 1400 and the 1730s was active. So the triangle international trade routes of East Asia need to be added to Frank's two maps, "Map. 2.1. Major Circum-Global Trade Routes, 1400-1800"⁵⁸ and "Map. 2.5. Asian Region Major Trade Routes 1400-1800."⁵⁹

V. CONCLUSION

Here I addressed A. G. Frank's views about 15th-19th Korea (Joseon Dynasty) in his *Reorient*. A. G. Frank recognized that Korea might have played a great role in the international relations of East Asia, but he did not write systematically about it and he did not treat Korea as an independent player in the history of East Asia. I think the greatest limitation to his re-interpretation of East Asia is in that he depends too much on the perspective of China and Japan.

In order to overcome Frank's shortcomings on the history of Korea, first I examined what Frank recognized about the Joseon dynasty between 1400 and 1800. Next I compared Joseon's development to that of China and Japan between 1400 and 1800. Frank compared Europe and East Asia (mainly China and Japan)

⁵⁷Jung Seongil, *Joseon Hugi Daeil Muyeok* (Trade with Japan in the Late Joseon Dynasty) (Seoul: Sinseoweon, 2000), 359.

⁵⁸ Frank, *Reorient*, 65; Albert Bergesen, "Frankian Triangles," in *Andre Gunder Frank and Global Development*, ed. P. Manning and B. K. Gills (New York: Routledge, 2011), 25-40.

⁵⁹ Frank, *Reorient*, 94.

from three aspects (population, production, productivity, and trade), qualities (science and technology), and mechanism (economic and financial institutions).

With this research we insist that Joseon should not be dismissed in 15th-19th East Asia. The reasons are as follows. First, Joseon between 1400 and 1800 had developed economically as much as China and Japan. Second, Joseon had played a great role in connecting China and Japan and had positive influence on the development of Japan. So we need to reappraise *Reorient's* view about East Asia. Only when role of Joseon can be correctly estimated, the dynamics and diversity of East Asia can be properly understood.