

ABSTRACT

Population Pressure and the Socio-economic Change in Pre-capitalist Korea, from 17th to 19th Centuries

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While it is indispensable to investigate the pre-capitalist social structure in verifying the traits of modern Korea, due attention has not been paid to the field. Moreover, the two contending approaches to Korean pre-capitalist history, "feudalism" and "Asiatic mode of production", are very problematic and controversial. In this thesis, with the focus on the demographic change, I intend to provide clear view on the socio-economic conditions of Korea from 17th to 19th centuries and to examine the two dominant approaches.

As a first step, I review four theories - Malthusian, Commercialization, Class Relations, and Institutional models - of the relation between population change and economic development. Among others the Institutional model makes two noticeable contributions; the role of state in the process of economic development and actor-oriented perspective.

After the review and examination of various models, the framework for the analysis is constructed in the third chapter. "Demographic change" as an independent variable eventually determines the "economic development /underdevelopment" by way of the intermediate variables, "urbanization", "surplus labor-technological development", and "state power".

Next step is to provide the overlook view of socio-economic change of Korea

from 17th to 19th centuries. First, there was considerable population pressure during the period. Second, most of the increase in population is absorbed in the traditional agriculture system for the lack of capability of industrial sectors. Third, the easy accessibility to surplus labor modified the agriculture to more labor-intensified form and frustrated the possible economic development to be propelled by increased labor productivity. Finally, the state made use of the socio-economic change initiated by the population pressure. It strengthened the despotic power to levy more taxes by authorizing additional power to local officials.

Considering the above discussions, two implications of the thesis are suggested. First, the population pressure of traditional Korea hindered the labor-saving technological development in agriculture, and the agricultural productivity moved slightly upward, if not stand still, only by dint of rising land productivity. Second, the two contending approaches to pre-capitalist Korea, "feudalism" and "Asiatic Mode of Production", are improper to investigate the interactions of social actors - state, landlords, and peasants - in the context of demographic change. It is desirable to specify "the relations" among the actors and to focus on "the process" of socio-economic change rather than to evaluate the pre-capitalist economic development with the omnipotent but blind measure of modernization.

Key Words: Population, Population Pressure, Pre-capitalist Society, Economic Development, Productivity of Agriculture, Urban Population, State Power, Feudalism, Asiatic Mode of Production, Institutionalism,