



# It's Madness: The Politics of Mental Health in Colonial Korea

By Theodore Jun Yoo

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*It's Madness* examines Korea's years under Japanese colonialism, when mental health first became defined as a medical and social problem. As in most Asian countries, severe social ostracism, shame, and fear of jeopardizing marriage prospects compelled most Korean families to conceal the mentally ill behind closed doors. This book explores the impact of Chinese traditional medicine and its holistic approach to treating mental disorders, the resilience of folk illnesses as explanations for inappropriate and dangerous behaviors, the emergence of clinical psychiatry as a discipline, and the competing models of care under the Japanese colonial authorities and Western missionary doctors. Drawing upon unpublished archival as well as printed sources, this is the first study to examine the ways in which "madness" was understood, classified, and treated in traditional Korea and the role of science in pathologizing and redefining mental illness under Japanese colonial rule.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"[Breaks] new ground... [Yoo has] offered readers an ambitious challenge: one directed to Korean studies, but also one also carrying its implications far beyond."  
(*Cross-Currents*)

#### From the Inside Flap

"How to categorize 'normal behavior' at a time of tumultuous social and economic change when everyone is grappling with the questions of the modern in a colonial setting? This was the challenge confronting the introduction of psychiatry in Korea in the first half of the twentieth century, the subject of Theodore Jun Yoo's sweeping and dramatic history of mental health. Yoo examines the criminalization and medicalization of a wide array of behavior—whether sensational murder cases or mundane cases of marital discord—to show how native beliefs and folklore practices mediated new social pathologies of abnormality. *It's Madness* recounts, colorfully and with flair, just how mad it really was." —Andre Schmid, author of *Korea Between Empires, 1895–1919*

"Highly original. There has been increased interest in colonial and non-Western psychiatry in recent years, and this book will be an important addition to the existing scholarship."—Andrew Scull, author of *Madness in Civilization: A Cultural History of Insanity, from the Bible to Freud, from the Madhouse to Modern Medicine*

#### About the Author

**Theodore Jun Yoo** is Associate Professor of Korean Language and Literature at Yonsei University. He is the author of *The Politics of Gender in Colonial Korea: Education, Labor, and Health, 1910–1945*.

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#### James Bergeron:

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**Tony Jacobson:**

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