Book Notes

Invincible and Righteous Outlaw: The Korean Hero Hong Gildong in Literature, History, and Culture by Minsoo Kang. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019. xxiii, 235 pp.

On the heels of his new translation of *The Story of Hong Gildong*,[1] which brings the longest extant manuscript of the work to English readers, Minsoo Kang delves deeper into this classic tale with *Invincible and Righteous Outlaw*. As a historian, Kang brings a critical eye to "a set of cultural and historical myths surrounding *The Story of Hong Gildong*" (xiii) in what is to date the only book-length treatment of the character and the tale available in English.

The book is divided into two disparate parts, the first being a literary and historical analysis of the work and the scholarship surrounding it, and the second being an examination of the "afterlives" lived by Hong Gildong in modern times. These two parts, as the author admits, "read like two different types of scholarship" (xxii), but they come together to paint a more complete picture of the classical novel; either part without the other might have felt lacking.

The chapter titles of the first part—which mention "phantom," "fog of myth," "elusive traces," and "the imagined Hong Gildong"—make the author's project clear: brushing away the accumulated dust of myth to find the truth hidden beneath. In the first chapter, Kang outlines four persistent ideas that will become the focus of his investigation: that *The Story of Hong Gildong* is the first work of vernacular Korean (that is, authored in *hangeul*) fiction; that it was

1. Hŏ Kyun [Heo Gyun], *The Story of Hong Gildong*, trans. Minsoo Kang (New York: Penguin Books, 2016).

Seoul Journal of Korean Studies 32, no. 2 (December 2019): 339–356.

written in the seventeenth century by the Joseon official and literary figure Heo Gyun; that it draws attention to the plight of secondary sons (*seoja*; sons of concubines); and that Heo Gyun was an idealistic reformer executed for treason. Kang lays out the historical evidence, including a discussion of the invention and use of *hangeul* and the circumstances surrounding Heo Gyun's arrest. Mainly, though, he focuses on demonstrating that there is little historical evidence outside of a single claim by a contemporary of Heo that Heo Gyun actually wrote such a work, or that—even if he did write a tale of Hong Gildong—the manuscripts we possess today are that same work. This is not an unreasonable assertion, seeing as how none of the extant manuscripts can be dated to any earlier than the nineteenth century. Kang also shows that it was not until 1948 that a claim was made that *The Story of Hong Gildong* was the first work of *hangeul* fiction, as opposed to being written in classical Chinese as was standard for the *yangban* of Heo Gyun's time.

Having examined the historical evidence, in the second chapter Kang explores how Kim Taejun's *The History of Joseon Fiction* created the image of Hong Gildong as a socialist reformer and hero of the people that is commonly accepted among the public today.[2] Then, in the last chapter of the first part, he argues that attempting to fit the novel into subversive or conservative frames colors our perception of the work, leading us to see things that might not have been present in the original. Freeing ourselves of these misconceptions, Kang argues, allows us to see that *The Story of Hong Gildong* is a "prime example of the popular heroic martial narratives that began to appear in the late 18th century" (84). He then compares it to other such narratives, showing how it fits much more naturally into the literary environment of the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries than the early seventeenth century. Yet, he bemoans, modern interpretations cling to the "notion of Hong Gildong as a moral exemplar" (89) and are thus forced to alter or supplement the text.

The second part of the book begins with an examination of representations of Hong Gildong during the colonial period, contrasting perception of him among Koreans as a "symbol of the indomitable spirit of the Korean people in the face of powerful enemies" (112) and the Japanese perspective that saw him as "a devious, selfish, and opportunistic criminal" (112). This is also when the tale first appeared on the silver screen, although it did depart significantly from the original work in an attempt to deal with "complicated and agonizing questions of Korean identity" (119).

The following chapter examines Hong Gildong as he was portrayed in both

2. Kim Taejun, *Jeungbo Joseon soseolsa* (Seoul: Han'gilsa, 1990).

North and South Korea following liberation from the Japanese. Pak Taewon's 1947 novel is a social-realist take that is the first to depict the hero stealing from the rich and giving to the poor,[3] and the comic book version produced by Sin Dongu in 1965[4] cemented Hong Gildong in the minds of the public as a Korean version of Robin Hood. Kang balks at this comparison, arguing that the original Hong Gildong was no Robin Hood, but it is worth noting that Robin Hood himself was not originally a hero of the people either,[5] so the comparison might be more apt than it first appears. Meanwhile, the lone North Korean contribution was a film made in 1986 that is little more than a martial arts film; one cannot help but wonder if there might not be more versions of the tale waiting to be uncovered north of the DMZ.

In the final chapter, which deals with depictions of Hong Gildong over the last twenty-five years in South Korea, Kang examines literature, Hallyu dramas and films, and even Hong Gildong tourism. The section on tourism in particular is a fascinating, if brief, look at the paradox of traditional culture tourism, namely that "the demands of the quintessentially modern industry of tourism inevitably jeopardize the very authenticity that is advertized as an essential element of a particular site's attraction" (183).

In a book that sets out to bust myths surrounding a beloved classical work, the author will inevitably step on a few toes along the way. It is one thing to be controversial, though, and another to be unfair, and Kang's harsh assessment of Korean academia strikes this reviewer as the latter. At the start of the second chapter, Kang states that "the vast majority of academic scholars as well as the general public hold ideas about the work based on evidence that turns out to be highly suspect when placed under scrutiny," and that, despite research shedding light on these problems by scholars such as Yi Yunseok,[6] Baek Seongjong,[7] and Yi Bokgyu,[8] "Academics have generally ignored the issue and repeated the

---

3. Pak Taewon, *Hong Gildong jeon* (Seoul: Joseon geumyung johap yeonhaphoe, 1947).

4. Sin Dongu [Shin Dong Wu], *Sin Dongu keolleksyeon* (Seoul: Bucheon manhwa jeongbo senteo, 2007).

5. On Robin Hood, see J.C. Holt, *Robin Hood: Revised and Enlarged Edition* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989) or works by Stephen Knight, including *Robin Hood: A Complete Survey of the English Outlaw* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) and *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

6. Yi Yunseok [Lee Yoon Suk], "*Hong Gildong jeon* wonbon hwakjeong eul wihan siron," *Dongbang hakji* 85 (1994): 247–285.

7. Baek Seongjong [Paik Sung-Jong], "Gososeol *Hong Gildong jeon* ui chohak e daehan jaegeomto," *Jindan hakbo* 80 (1995): 307–331.

8. Yi Bokgyu [Lee Pok-kyu], "Chogi gungmun soseol ui jonjae yangsan," *Gukje eomun* 21 (2000): 25–44.

received ideas in scholarly works and textbooks" (32). This in itself is a charge worth investigating. But Kang goes on to add a further, more serious charge of a lack of academic rigor and integrity throughout an entire field: "This is the result of both indifference to new research in the field and reluctance to question the significance of a cherished literary work of national importance to Korean culture" (32). He expands on this idea later with more speculation: "One might speculate that the persistence of this idea in modern scholarship may be reflective of an intellectual elitism that would prefer to regard the beloved classic of Korean fiction as the work of a learned *yangban* rather than of an anonymous commercial writer of lower social status and educational level" (62).

It is very difficult to prove an absence of something, as one necessarily has to survey all, or at least most, of the literature in a field. Many of the sources cited as examples of the traditional views, though, are English-language sources, and some of the Korean-language sources are now long out-of-date. For example, when claiming that the myth of Heo Gyun as author "is still the mainstream view in Korea" (66), Kang cites a history that was translated into English in 1984 but was in fact originally published in Korean in 1968.[9] Kang does attempt to dismantle a theory put forth in 2002 by Jang Hyohyeon (78-82),[10] but this is notable for being the exception rather than the rule. Kang's claim that Korean academia has been steadfast in its hidebound refusal to contemplate new research might have been more convincing had he provided more evidence directly from recent Korean scholarship.

Although there is insufficient space here to conduct a broad survey, a few examples of recent scholarship will be instructive. The authors of *History of Korean Literature* (2018), while concluding that there is a good likelihood that Heo Gyun is the author of *The Story of Hong Gildong*, do point out a number of the problems with this idea and avoid making a definitive statement.[11] Even more recently, Yi Jongpil dedicates roughly half of a brief section on the "issues of the author and original work" of *The Story of Hong Gildong* to the theories of Yi Yunseok, presenting them as reasonable evidence against the traditional view.[12] Pak Huibyeong notes the following in his discussion of the novel: "I presume *The Story of Hong Gildong* written by Heo Gyun in the early seventeenth century to be a work of classical Chinese [*hanmun*]. Heo Gyun's

9. Yi Gibaek [Ki-baik Lee], *Hanguksa sillon* (Seoul: Iljogak, 1968).

10. Jang Hyohyeon [Jang Hyo-hyon], *Hanguk gojeon soseolsa yeongu* (Seoul: Goryeo daehakgyo chulpanbu, 2002).

11. Yi Jongseok and Jeong Soyeon, *Hanguk munhaksa* (Seoul: Hanguk munhwasa, 2018), 495–496.

12. Yi Jongpil, "*Hong Gildong jeon*," *Hanguk gososeol gangui*, compiled by Hanguk gososeol hakhoe (Paju: Dolbegae, 2019), 295–296.

work is no longer extant. The extant *hangeul* versions are thought to be the products of later generations who embellished and expanded on Heo Gyun's original."[13] Pak goes on to mention Yi Yunseok's research, but concludes that there is not enough definitive evidence to reach the conclusion that Yi proposes.

Indeed, the general consensus in Korean academia today is that the extant manuscripts of *The Story of Hong Gildong* are indeed the product of an unknown later writer (or writers), although there are significant differences in opinion about how closely these later manuscripts resemble Heo Gyun's alleged original work—which is understandable, considering the fact that no such work remains today. It would not be unreasonable to claim that the question of the novel's authorship and date is still unresolved, with a broad spectrum of opinions ranging from the traditional view to a wholesale rejection of that view. Whatever the case, it is not true that Korean academia in general refuses to countenance any new research that might challenge established views, or that scholars like Yi Yunseok are lone voices crying in the wilderness, completely ignored by a fossilized and unsympathetic establishment. In a book that does such an admirable job of arguing against long-held myths surrounding *The Story of Hong Gildong*, it seems a shame to introduce a new one.

This does not have any bearing on the merits of the author's arguments themselves, though; they are a valuable addition to English-language scholarship on an important work of classical Korean literature. Kang's book is doubly important considering the fact that research on and publication of *The Story of Hong Gildong* in the English-speaking world lags considerably behind Korea both in terms of quantity and nuance. The character of Hong Gildong has surely taken on a far greater and broader significance than his original author intended, and he appears as different things to different people. In the same way, the arguments surrounding Hong Gildong are a complex tapestry that cannot be captured at a single glance. This book weaves a critical thread into that tapestry and brings it to an English-speaking audience, thus making it an important addition to the scholarship on classical Korean novels.

Charles La Shure
Associate Professor, Department of Korean Language and Literature
Seoul National University

13. Pak Huibyeong, *Hanguk gojeon soseol yeongu ui bangbeopjeok jipyeong* (Goyang: Allep, 2019), 67–68.

King Chŏngjo, An Enlightened Despot in Early Modern Korea by Christopher Lovins. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019. 246 pp.

Christopher Lovins' 2019 publication marks the first book outside of Korea to delve into the reign of King Chŏngjo (r. 1776–1800). Detailed studies of Chŏngjo's reign, however, have a long history dating back to the late nineteenth century. The title by which we know the monarch today, Chŏngjo, is actually different from the original title posthumously bestowed upon him (Chŏngjong). It was created during the reign of Kojong (1863–1907), reflecting the rectification of titles following Kojong's elevation to the level of emperor in 1899. Direct and indirect research on the monarch has continued since 1945, but the image of Chŏngjo that has emerged since the 1990s is one of a reformer and an "impartial monarch" (*t'angp'yŏng kunju*), referring to his policy of skillfully balancing the demands of various court factions. It is common knowledge that, since that time, there has been an explosion in research on Chŏngjo. Within this outpouring of research, the most active area has been Korean historical studies focusing on the eighteenth century, with the vast majority being conducted in Korean. This is markedly different from the past, which was characterized by competition between foreign and domestic (Korean) research. Processing such an extensive body of research on this period presents special challenges for foreign researchers and consumes a considerable amount of time, meaning that most such research has been limited to a comparatively superficial level. Every year for the past two decades or so over a thousand books and articles have been published on the Chosŏn Era. Considering this outpouring of research on this era, Lovins' volume on Chŏngjo's reign may be viewed as a bold new attempt at forging new research.

The book is structured as follows:

In the nine chapters that constitute the book, Lovins demonstrates, aside from some very recent offerings, a strong command of relevant Korean-language and

foreign research, presenting a blueprint for Chŏngjo's reign. The greatest strength of the book is that it presents a thorough overview of not only early foreign-language research on the Chosŏn period, but also current Korean-language research. As such, the book will prove to be a very useful source on eighteenth-century Korea not only for Korean history scholars outside of Korea but also non-specialists interested in traditional Korean culture. The book moreover provides domestic Korean researchers the opportunity to engage with research in adjacent fields abroad.

Aside from his broad treatment of foreign and domestic research trends, Lovins also seeks to present a theoretical framework with a unique perspective. Overall, individual research findings presented in the book rely largely on Korean-language research achievements, while these are in turn abstracted to construct a certain theoretical model. This may be seen in the book's subtitle, "An Enlightened Despot in Early Modern Korea." This approach begs two questions. First, was King Chŏngjo an "enlightened despot" (*kyemong chŏnje kunju*)? Second, can eighteenth-century Korea be considered "early modern"? Detailed treatments of these two issues are presented in Chapters 1 and 7, which will no doubt be the portions of the book of most interest to domestic Korean researchers. In these chapters, Lovins evaluates Chŏngjo in comparison with various European monarchies. Conversely, Lovins' treatment of Korean-language research presented in Chapters 2 through 6 will prove more useful to an overseas readership with less grounding in Chosŏn history. Domestic researchers will, on the other hand, be more attracted to comparisons with absolute monarchs in European history.

In particular, in Chapter 1 Lovins' employment of Victor Lieberman's model to compare Eastern and Western history according to unified standards of "early modern" and "absolutism" is especially impressive. When comparing Qing China (1644–1911) and Chosŏn Korea in *A Heritage of Kings*, JaHyun Kim Haboush (1988) chose to use the term "autocracy," establishing this as a concept separate from absolutism. In Europe, autocracy itself arose in opposition to absolute monarchy and was utilized in various dictatorships of the modern era. The concept has also been commonly employed by American scholars of the Qing era (Spence 1966). Yi T'aejin (1993) meanwhile introduced the concept of "enlightened absolute monarchs" (*chŏldae kyemong kunju*) centered in Prussia and Eastern Europe and compared these with the case of Chŏngjo. This is a comparative approach premised on a division between advanced Western European absolutism and less developed Eastern European enlightened despotism. Of course, from another perspective, some current research within the Anglosphere is attempting to locate the origins of the modern nation-state

model of the European Enlightenment in the state system of Ming and Qing China by examining the Jesuit missions there. Moreover, with the birth of the European Union, a consensus has gained strength in the Anglosphere portraying all European monarchies as a form of "enlightened absolutism" or "enlightened despotism" from an integrative perspective. Thus, based on previous research, Lovins attempts to move beyond the unified Europe conceptualization to instead reevaluate the East and West according to the same criteria. In particular, he clearly eschews the application of modern legal concepts diachronically, maintaining a cautious historical approach. The king, after all, was still the king, obliged to protect and preserve his kingdom. This seems to indicate that his intention is not to narrowly analyze the rule of law in an economic sense within British parliamentarism, which resonates with the various interpretations of constitutionalism proposed by Francis Fukuyama, whom Lovins cites. This is an exemplary case in Korean Studies of a balanced perspective that moves beyond the Orientalist paradigm.

However, when the Lieberman model is limited only to European history, the centralized, sovereign state may be termed modern absolutism, but in an East Asia characterized by exceptionally long dynasties, the absence of centralized territorial states was quite rare. Therefore, in Lieberman's model the role of the sovereign in a centralized monarchy may be construed as a universal phenomenon.

Moreover, discussions of the concepts of "modernity" (*kŭnse*) and "absolutism" based on the approaches by Lieberman and others seem to have been omitted from this study. Engaging more with these fundamental concepts I believe would have facilitated more organic connections between the reader and the central concern of the book. The concept of "early modern" seems to have been created in Japan through Naitō Torajirō's 內藤湖南 (1947) "Theory of the Tang-Song transition" (K. *Tang-Song pyŏnhyŏkkiron*; J. *Chūkoku kinseishi*), re-exported to the Anglosphere and applied to post-renaissance states of Europe before finally being appropriated into mid-century modern Korean scholarship in various iterations and then ultimately discarded. In today's East Asia, the term "early modern" is still a popular term in the field of Japanese history. In Korean history, however, there have been successive revisions of terminologies to refer to various historical periods and monarchical systems (Kim Paekch'ŏl 2014; Yi Hŏnch'ang 2017).

The comparison most extensively developed by Lovins is that between Louis XIV of France and the Qing Emperor Qianlong. Particularly intriguing is the overall composition of the French Catholic monarchy in comparison with the Confucian monarchy of China. Lovins provides rich comparisons between the

processes of change which occurred under the Qing Emperors Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong (1661–1796) and Louis XIV, XV, and XVI (1643–1792). Throughout the course of this comparison, Lovins maintains an unbiased tone, analyzing the similarities of Eastern and Western monarchies according to a standard criteria while presenting various differences earnestly and revealing comparative historical points of view faithfully.

First, Lovins explains the similarities between Qianlong's Qing and Chosŏn in terms of Confucian monarchy, two examples being government structure and Confucian bureaucracy. At the same time, the contrast he draws between the Ming-era military adventurist Emperor Yongle (1402–1424) and Qianlong, which he then redeploys in a comparison with King Chŏngjo, is intriguing. This demonstrates a "role reversal," where the Han Chinese ostensibly representing "central efflorescence" (*Zhonghua*) instead stood for military prowess, and the supposedly barbarian Manchu paradoxically represented civil administration by scholar-officials. The comparison between King Chŏngjo's reign and the Han-era philosopher Zheng Xuan's enshrinement in the Qing Confucian shrine, which contributed to the emergence of evidential learning, is reminiscent of Kim Munsik's eclectic appraisal of Han and Song China (1996). However, it is somewhat regrettable that there was no mention of the fact that Emperor Qianlong, despite empathizing with such military adventurism, failed to personally embark on such an expedition (Elliot 2009).

There is also the comparison between the secret memorial *zouzhe* 奏摺 of Qing China and Chŏngjo's secret royal letters (*pimil ŏch'al*). While the former denotes texts from subjects to the emperor and the latter letters from the king to subjects, both texts represent secret communication between sovereign and subject. The comparison between the two is fresh, but because in previous research on the Qing era the image of the *zouzhe* that has arisen is the negative image of informative gathering in support of bolstering imperial authority rather than communication, more detailed analysis may be in order.

Next, there is the comparison between France and Chosŏn. Lovins argues that Qing was a vast, complex, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural empire, making any comparison with France or Chosŏn in terms of concentration of power difficult. Much like Fukuyama, he describes the reign of King Louis XIV in seventeenth-century France as a "somewhat weak" form of absolutism, likening it to the rule of King Chŏngjo in eighteenth-century Chosŏn. In his excellent comparison, Lovins moreover reminds the reader that, much like Chosŏn kings who were constrained by memorials and public opinion, French monarchs as well were limited by parliament and the chancellery and were obligated to deliberate before coming to a decision. Also interesting is the contrast between

the "Sun King" (Louis XIV) and the "Lord of the Shining Moon and the Myriad Streams" (Manch'ŏn myŏngwŏl chuin'ong 萬川明月主人翁), the new pen name King Chŏngjo adopted for himself the year before his death. Describing the instances of religious rituals employed by various French monarchs, Lovins contrasts Confucian edification with the defense of Catholicism. Particularly noteworthy was that leaders in both countries had to act as "good jugglers," embodying harmony and balance between political forces as they persuaded the elite in concentrating political authority. Moreover, through an excellent comparison between Chŏngjo's "Relaxed Restrictions on Secondary Sons" (*Sŏŏl hŏt'ong*) and the emergence of France's new nobility, he demonstrates transformations in the ruling strata of these societies. He also offers a fresh perspective in contrasting the conflict between Confucianism and Catholicism with that between Catholicism and Puritanism. Both conflicts seem to have in common the incompleteness of the reforms which they engendered.

Of course, the differences between France and Chosŏn Korea are not overlooked. While the Chosŏn king had absolute authority over the appointment and dismissal of the central bureaucracy and provincial governors, the French king had to be prepared to offer "compensation" in case of dismissal. Whereas high officials in Chosŏn had the right to meet face to face with the king, this was not the case in France. Also impressive was Lovins' discussion of the differing issues of military authority and the concentration of power that stemmed from a European history riven with warfare and a relatively more peaceful Chosŏn. Moreover, the contrasting of social aspects in the two countries is appropriate give the presence of church and papal authority in one and its absence in the other. We must remember that the French absolute monarch had to decide between Catholicism and Protestantism while at the same time utilizing Catholicism all while asserting his independence from the Pope.

One critique that arises is that, while comparing continental France with Chosŏn Korea may be appropriate, it must be kept in mind that by the eighteenth century European trading powers had started to increase their overseas colonial territories. This not only led to considerably differing economic foundations, but also serves ultimately as a clue explaining, despite its revolution, France's nineteenth-century imperial expansionism, while partially explaining its divergent path from Chosŏn Korea. I assume that the author deliberately restricted his comparison to seventeenth-century France because its overseas colonial territories were more modest then.

Nonetheless, there are other similarly impressive comparative analyses. Lovins points out that Chŏngjo's journeys outside of the capital, similar to Queen Elizabeth I of England, were frequent, and he also compares the

tradition of popular petitions to the monarch (*sangŏn kyŏkchaeng*) in Chosŏn Korea with Joseph II of the Holy Roman Empire. Also of interest are comparative case studies of Henry II and Charles I of England. In the case of Chosŏn the examples of Kings T'aejong and Sejong are introduced, and in a comparison between Sejong's Hall of Worthies (*Chiphyŏnjŏn*) and Chŏngjo's Kyujanggak, Lovins evaluates the latter as playing a more active role in executing the king's orders. In particular, while King Yŏngjo, who had come to the throne quite suddenly, employed emotional displays in the hope of embodying the figure of the sage king, weeping and fasting in order to compel recalcitrant officials, Chŏngjo instead showed direct military training, suggesting from the outset that he felt no need to prove anything to his officials, exercising predetermined legitimacy by virtue of his identity as successor to the throne. This analysis is also in line with a recent reinterpretation in Korean scholarship of Chŏngjo's legitimacy.

Lovins also explains the birth of modern society by presenting examples of urbanization in seventeenth-century London and eighteenth-century Paris and Edo, Japan. At the same time, he points out that, because of the lack of a Commerce Council as in France, Chosŏn merchants were not able to consult with the state. However, during the reign of Yŏngjo the appointment of a Minister of Tribute and Commerce (*Kongsi tangsang* 貢市堂上) in charge of tribute middle men (*kongmul chuin*) and metropolitan merchants and the permanent installment of a Tribute and Commerce Inquiry Conference (Kongsi sunmun 貢市詢問), an organ that oversaw these same groups through the direct involvement of the king, offer counterevidence of a significant alternative policy for exerting commercial interests on state authority (see studies by Kim Paekch'ŏl, Yi Kŭnho, and Kim Chŏngja). In particular, it may be helpful to cross-analyze this with research findings by Kim Munsik, Kim Sŏngyun, and Ko Tonghwan on commercialization in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Seoul.

When discussing the latter period of absolute monarchy as well, Lovins seems to explain a gradual erosion of authority through comparisons between the French Revolution and the Hong Kyŏngnae Rebellion (1812), Catholic persecutions, and so-called "in-law government" (*sedo chŏngch'i*) in Chosŏn. It is also interesting to view the dissolution of the French parliament under Louis XV and XVI and the discord between King Kojong and the Taewŏngun as evidence of the crippling of royal authority.

The ultimate aim of this book is to analyze the reign of King Chŏngjo as a form of conflict between kingship and tyranny. Lovins concludes that Chŏngjo "constantly walked the line between absolute rule and arbitrary rule, enlightened despotism and tyranny" (149). The king must fight for good causes

and show proper justification for such causes, but at the same time it is difficult to maintain ruling power if the darker aspects of that power are concealed. Indeed, such an evaluation not only aligns with basic outlines of the monarch presented in the works he cites (Pak Hyŏnmo 2001), but also a similar evaluation of Yŏngjo's image as an "impartial monarch" (Kim Paekch'ŏl 2014).

In particular, Louis XIV's "divide and rule" strategy is reminiscent of Haboush's evaluation of Sukchong, and one wonders if Lovins would not have come to a similar conclusion comparing these two seventeenth-century leaders. This may have in fact produced a more overarching comparison, including Sukchong, Yŏngjo and Chŏngjo in a trio of "impartial monarchs." Of course, because this would lead to a comparison between the periods after the French Revolution and the Hong Kyŏngnae Rebellion (1812), the author seems to have refrained from comparing Chŏngjo and Louis XVI. Nevertheless, the Sun King Louis XIV's emulation of the Chinese Emperor in the performance of the Royal Plowing Ceremony (*ch'in'gyŏngnye* 親耕禮) and the performance of this ceremony at the same appointed times in Qing and Chosŏn may be understood in the same context. This seems to be a common atmosphere appearing during the reigns of Sukchong, Yŏngjo, and Chŏngjo in Chosŏn and Emperors Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong in Qing, that is to say, the model seventeenth- and eighteenth-century monarchs who pushed ideological causes (pertaining both to Confucianism and Catholicism) to the fore in the exercise of absolute authority. It is very unusual for the Qing emperor and the late-Chosŏn king to present "direct" Confucian justification while leading government ministers and claiming the position of "scholar king" (*kunsa* 君師). Thus, applying the Lieberman model alone is insufficient, and Lovins' contrasting conceptual paradigm—Confucian and Catholic monarchies—can only gain persuasive power in light of these limitations. This, I must say, is the book's greatest virtue.

Finally, this book revealed interesting facts about various overseas research findings from different cultural areas, and in this respect it is a very useful text. It was quite a rewarding experience to read a refreshingly solid piece of scholarship dealing with the reign of Chŏngjo.

References

Elliot, Mark C. *Emperor Qianlong: Son of Heaven, Man of the World*. New York: Pearson Longman, 2009.

Haboush, Kim JaHyun. *A Heritage of Kings*: *One Man's Monarchy in the Confucian World*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.

Kim Munsik. *Chosŏn hugi kyŏnghak sasang yŏn'gu: Chŏngjo wa Kyŏnggi hagin ŭl chungsim ŭro* [Studies of the classics in the late Chosŏn period: Focusing on King Chŏngjo and the Kyŏnggi scholars]. Seoul: Ilchogak, 1996.

Kim Paekch'ŏl [Kim Paek-chol]. *Tu ŏlgul ŭi Yŏngjo: 18-segi t'angp'yŏng kunjusang ŭi chaegŏmt'o* [The two faces of Yŏngjo: A reexamination of the 'impartial monarchs' of the eighteenth century]. P'aju: T'aehaksa, 2014.

Naitō Torajirō 內藤湖南. *Chūkoku kinseishi* 中國近世史 [Early Modern Chinese History]. Tōkyō: Kōbundō, 1947.

Pak Hyŏnmo. *Chŏngch'iga Chŏngjo* [King Chŏngjo the politician]. Seoul: P'urŭn yŏksa, 2001.

Spence, Jonathan D. *Ts'ao Yin and the K'ang-hsi Emperor: Bondservant and Master*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966.

Yi Hŏnch'ang. "Chosŏn wangjo ŭi chŏngch'i ch'eje; Chŏltae kunjuje (Absolutism)" [Political systems of the Chosŏn monarchy: Absolutism]. *Kyŏngje sahak* 65 (2017): 215–272.

Yi T'aejin. "Chŏngjo: Yugyojŏk kyemong chŏldae kunju" [Chŏngjo: A Confucian enlightened absolute monarch]. *Han'guksa simin kangjwa* 13 (1993): 61–85.

Kim Paek-chol
Assistant Professor, Department of History
Keimyung University

From the Mountains to the Cities: A History of Buddhist Propagation in Modern Korea by Mark A. Nathan. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018. xii, 196 pp.

This book is a useful contribution to several fields of research. It adds to current research on the relationship between the state and Buddhism and also offers a global vision of the history of mainstream Korean Buddhism since the end of the nineteenth century. This ambition—to present the contemporary history of Korean Buddhism in an accessible and concise volume in English—is extremely helpful. Despite the magnitude of the task, Mark Nathan manages to give a coherent account by following a specific approach: the development of propagation (*p'ogyo*) within Buddhism. This clear angle leaves some themes aside, but Nathan presents this focus on propagation in a very convincing way and shows the relevance of this issue for understanding the contemporary history of Buddhism in Korea. The development of Buddhist propagation

strategies in the twentieth century is the opposite of an epiphenomenon. As this book demonstrates, they have not only strengthened the role and status of Buddhism in society but also contributed to its profound reform. The merits of this approach are twofold: it makes it possible to draw lines of continuity in the contemporary history of Korean Buddhism that contribute greatly to the understanding of its evolutions and it also makes it possible to address less investigated aspects of Buddhism such as the evolution of its legal framework or its media.

The book is organized chronologically. The introductory chapter situates the concept of propagation within Buddhist traditions in Asia. It describes how the place of propagation within the history of Buddhism has been debated and provides useful conceptual clarifications (for example, on the difference between dissemination and conversion).

After this introduction, chapter 2 discusses the end of Chosŏn and highlights the relation between the concept of modernity, the normative framework for what constitutes a religion, and the valorization of propagation. It sheds light on the many factors that contributed to the lifting of the ban on Buddhist nuns and monks entering major cities. It also explores the meaning and influence of the "mountain Buddhism" trope. Nathan shows how the relation between the principle of religious liberty and the freedom to propagate one's religion was established at the end of the nineteenth century. Clarifying the relation between these two notions as well as the consequences of this connection is an important contribution of this book. Like Vincent Goossaert in the case of China, Nathan disentangles the relationship between different legal frameworks, a normative definition of religion, and the evolution of religious practices.

Chapter 3 furthers this reflection on Buddhism in the context of Japanese colonization. It shows how the anchorage of propagation within the normative and legal framework of recognized religions allowed monastics to legitimately engage in this activity but also allowed the colonial government to ensure control over these issues. Nathan thus contributes to the debate about the influence of colonization on the evolution of Buddhism in Korea and shows how the new legal context surrounding temples and their activities has served both as leverage for the spread of Buddhism and as an instrument of control and domination for the colonial government.

Chapter 4 discusses the period from 1945 to the end of the 1970s. It describes how divisions ignited by colonial rule were complicated by government intrusion—both by the US Army Military government and the South Korean government—into monastic affairs, facilitated by the legal framework resulting from colonization. Nathan points out that despite all the major crises and

difficulties, propagation has continued to be a major reference for Buddhist reformers and the main guideline for the monastic community's engagement with society. Moreover, he also analyses how the transformation of the political and legal framework surrounding Buddhism in the 1960s and 1970s contributed to renewing its propagation strategies. In particular, he emphasizes the development, from the 1970s onward, of individual propagation initiatives and sheds light on the multiplication of small-scale temples in urban areas, a fundamental characteristic of contemporary South Korean Buddhism.

Chapter 5 opens with the development of the Minjung Buddhism movement and its influence on general Buddhism in South Korea, explaining how Buddhists have integrated some of the Minjung principles into their tradition through references to Mahāyāna Buddhism and the bodhisattva ideal. Nathan shows how some of the Minjung values intersected with and partly renewed Buddhists' concerns about *p'ogyo*, especially through social welfare programs. This chapter offers many insights to better understand contemporary Buddhism and draws attention to the new forms of Buddhist temples that developed in the 1980s and 1990s. It also describes how the contemporary reevaluation of mountain temples has given a new impetus to propagation policies.

In chapter 6, the book concludes with a theoretical perspective based on Peter Berger's theories of secularization and religious pluralism. Nathan thus challenges the idea that monastic and secular practices of Buddhism are utterly separated by a clear border.

The book makes significant contributions to the history of Korean Buddhism. First, Nathan takes the risk of synthesizing the recent history of Korean Buddhism, an ultimately courageous and necessary undertaking. The angle of "propagation" is a judicious and convincing choice that allows the author to shed light on the contemporary dynamics of Buddhism in Korea (focusing on the Chogye Order) and on the major tensions and crises that its institutions have encountered. The attention given to the legal framework of religion provides a new perspective on the relationship between the state and Buddhism: Nathan makes it particularly clear how this framework contributes both to subjecting religious institutions to the state and to offering them new possibilities for action.

This attention to the influence of legal frameworks on the organization of Buddhism is one of the original and stimulating insights offered by the book. Yet it is also one of its limits, as it tends to overshadow actual practices and the different practical interpretations of the notion of *p'ogyo*. Depending on temples or Buddhist educators, the generic term *p'ogyo* can encompass a variety of different attitudes and opinions as to which practices should be encouraged or

regulated among practitioners. Describing the consequences of *p'ogyo* for forms of popular devotion, the teaching of Buddhist doctrine to laypersons, or forms of social engagement would have provided readers with a more varied Buddhist landscape. This same issue—the diversity of practical implementations of the notion of propagation—could also have been addressed by a more systematic analysis of debates and critiques within Korean Buddhism over the most accurate forms of propagation. These debates are briefly mentioned but could have been presented more in detail (for example, by including the critique of Buddhist secularization conducted in the context of the Pongamsa Community (*kyŏlsa*) in the late 1940s).

These last remarks do not affect the value of this book. Its main focus on the legal framework of Buddhism and its consequences on religious activity contributes to its real originality. It offers an innovative and convincing analysis of the contemporary transformations of Buddhism and successfully meets the challenge of providing a clear and thorough synthesis of its history, encompassing both the end of the nineteenth century and the present. *From the Mountains to the Cities* is therefore essential reading for anyone interested in the history of religions in East Asia or, more broadly, the relation between the state and religion.

Florence Galmiche
Associate Professor,
The Center for Studies on China, Korea and Japan,
EHESS-CNRS-Paris Diderot University

I Met Loh Kiwan by Cho Haejin. Translated by Ji-Eun Lee. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019. viii, 117 pp.

Although it is said you should never judge a book by its cover, it was this book's cover that drew me inexorably into it, even though I am not a literature specialist. The cover shows a decorative arched gate attached to an imposing neo-classicist row of houses, at first sight a generic stock image to illustrate the European background of the story that unfolds in this work. But it had an eerily familiar feel, and on second sight I noticed it was a road I had recently passed by in the capital of my home country, Belgium.

This short novel by Cho Haejin traces the travails of a North Korean refugee, Loh Kiwan, in Europe. However, rather than following him directly, the

author has framed his story within that of a South Korean writer for a TV show, identified only as Kim *chakka*. Frustrated by her own work as a writer for a human interest program, she uses a report about a North Korean refugee as her escape route from a dead-end job and relationship. She quits her job and breaks up with her boyfriend to travel to Brussels in an attempt to meet with Loh, with a vague plan to write a story on him.

Loh is thus in a sense the perennial stranger, the object of a quest that has to lead to self-discovery and possibly redemption for the narrator. After arriving in Brussels, Kim *chakka* meets the journalist who had written the initial story that attracted her attention. The journalist then introduces her to an elderly Korean expat, only identified as Pak. Having acted as a translator for Loh while his case as political refugee was being investigated, he is familiar with his story; moreover, he has Loh's diary. Rather than setting out to meet Loh directly—it turns out he has already left for London—the narrator decides to use the diary to literally retrace Loh's footsteps. Not only does she visit all the places he went to in Brussels, from the youth hostel where he slept to the McDonalds where he whiled away the time, she also tries to live like him, trying to survive on the meager money he had. She even endures the pain of hunger—to a certain extent at least because without the violent imposition of destitution, she is unable "to stomach Loh's experience and truly confront the misery he endured" (57). But the goal of her endeavor is clear: to seek redemption by identifying with the suffering of others.

Gradually we learn more about the baggage each of the three protagonists was carrying. For Loh, besides the depravations he had suffered in North Korea, he was forced to sell the body of his deceased mother to fund his escape from Yanji to Europe. For the narrator, it is the guilt of using the suffering of others as the subject of the TV shows she wrote for. In particular, she is haunted by Yunju, a young orphan in need of an operation. Deciding to postpone the operation so that the program about her could air at Chuseok, in the meantime Yunju's tumor has turned malignant. Pak for his part is tormented by the guilt of carrying out euthanasia on his wife.

As the translator points out in an afterword, this short novel exemplifies the "ethical turn" in South Korean literature: "Works embodying this ethical turn impose on the reader a mandate to identify and examine their ready assumptions, particularly about the criteria by which people divide themselves in ways that lead to suffering" (112). Indeed, it is in the unflinching engagement with the other that we can find our own humanity; but it is far from easy, in particular if the other is someone from North Korea, a country that has been reduced to the status of most extreme "other" in virtually all media that surround us. Perhaps it

is even more difficult for South Koreans, who are further burdened by the conflicting stereotypes of "enemy nation" and "our brethren."

Arguably the purpose of all good fiction is to de-familiarize the familiar and to familiarize the unfamiliar. In this the work succeeds remarkably well. Korean literature is no longer an exotic other; it now has a truly transnational dimension, speaking with equal authority on matters Korean and global. The choice of Brussels as background for the story is clearly not a random, gratuitous choice. The circuit of political refugees from Berlin via Brussels to London is an entirely credible one that has been taking place over the last few decades. Moreover, while the trajectory of Loh could have easily been reconstructed via Google maps, it is clear in the descriptions and the feel for the place that both the author and translator are familiar with Brussels, including how it feels in winter: "The temperature plunged, rain changed to snow, then snow became rain again. The result is something half frozen, neither rain nor snow, and it permeates the city of Brussels" (36).

Thus the novel succeeds on many levels, and can be fruitfully used in the classroom not only for Korean literature classes but also for courses on modern Korean history and culture. And thanks to its universal message it can hopefully also find its way to non-Korea related courses and audiences.

Sem Vermeersch
Associate Professor, Department of Religious studies
Seoul National University