

Note from the Editor

In the thirteen years that I have managed the *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies*, the world of academic publishing has seen its fair share of changes. When I started in 2008 the printed version was still paramount, since its contents were not yet easily available on the internet. Within South Korea, Nurimedia's DBPia made the articles available through its electronic databases, but since not many libraries outside Korea subscribed to it, we had to wait until Project Muse accepted the journal into its database in 2013 to gain a wider digital reach. The momentum now seems to have shifted from databases, which put the contents behind a paywall, to open access publishing, with new platforms such as PLOS One or MDPI creating new journals that can be freely downloaded and older journals striving to make their content available for free.

So where does that leave an established journal such as this? It would seem logical to simply go along with the trend and switch to making content freely available online. However, it is somewhat disheartening that there appears to be very little debate among academics about the implications of these shifting trends. "Free" is a relative concept: Although it is indeed convenient that any research article we are looking for can be found with a few mouse clicks in a matter of seconds, the hidden costs should also be considered. Researchers now frequently have to pay for the privilege of being published, and while those affiliated with a major university can usually reclaim the submission fee as research overheads, those without such an affiliation have to pay out of their own pocket.

Another hidden cost is that of editorial oversight and copyediting: Many commercial publishers cut corners on the editorial process, and demand that contributors deliver material in publishable form, doing little themselves in terms of fact checking or corrections. Of course, we urge contributors to employ their own editors so that manuscripts are delivered in good shape, but in practice most articles go through very extensive in-house copy editing and proof checking, involving the efforts of external copyeditors, editorial staff, and

myself.

But more fundamentally it seems to me that the idea of “content” has received too little critical reflection, and hence I use the term “content” reluctantly in relation to academic research. First of all, reducing research articles to mere “content” on the same level as Wikipedia pages or blog posts has the effect of effacing any qualitative difference. Second, and more importantly, it reduces research to something that can be easily packaged and repackaged for commercial purposes. In other words, it is convenient not just for the researcher-as-consumer, but also for the content-creating platform that seeks to valorize its “content.” Finally, and in the same vein, reducing research to content that is simply thrown out on the internet among all the other information may ultimately force researchers to become dependent on the amount of interest their article generates in terms of article views or citations.

Of course, it does not necessarily have to be this way: If academic institutions take the initiative in curating the online provision of academic research output, then of course it is possible to marry the quality control provided by the research institution that manages the journal with free availability. However, in practice it seems that many universities are merely latching on to what happens in the commercial world—with important exceptions of course, chief among which are JSTOR and Project Muse, which provide carefully curated selections of academic articles, albeit still behind a paywall.

This digression is ultimately somewhat self-serving, in that I am trying preemptively to justify the continued existence of this journal, and its role in curating and incubating new research to the highest possible standards. But what those standards are is, of course, a matter of continuing debate, and hence it is important to pass the torch of editorship to a new generation with new ideas on how to provide the best possible scholarship on Korean humanities!

Let me then return to the traditional purpose of this column, which is to introduce the articles in the current issue. I am very happy that this time too we can highlight our traditional strengths, which are research on premodern Korea and the introduction of resources and research in languages other than Korean. To start with the latter, besides the regular research articles, this issue also contains one article that introduces new research material and one extended review of a book that brings to light new visual and written documents on the life of an important figure in early contacts between Korea and the West. Both highlight the importance of European archives and collections in bringing to light new material on Korean Studies, and will hopefully be helpful toward providing new perspectives and possibilities for scholarship.

First Vladimír HLÁSNÝ presents us the fruit of fifteen intensive interviews

he conducted with Jaroslav Bařinka, a scholar and diplomat whose activities span nearly seven decades: Almost immediately after starting to learn Korean in late 1940's Czechoslovakia, Bařinka had the opportunity to forge close bonds with incoming North Korean students, and his efforts in maintaining those friendships over the years offer a fascinating insight into the changing political landscape of North Korea. Second, Tatiana SIMBIRTSEVA and Sergei VOLKOV evaluate the significance of a newly discovered cache of documents amongst the descendants of the Russian diplomat Carl von Waeber. Brought to light by the German scholar Sylvia Bräsel, who has recently published a book containing photographs of the diplomat, his family, and the people he met, the authors highlight the significance of this new visual evidence of von Waeber and his activities.

Returning then to the main research articles, this issue begins with Sungoh YOON's reevaluation of the so-called revival of Buddhism under Queen Munjeong, who dominated politics during the reign of her son, Myeongjong (1545–1567). He shows that the widely held view is problematic, since the idea of revival is predicated on the preceding eradication of Buddhism: however, while it was removed from the public realm, Buddhism was not actively eradicated even during the reign of King Jungjong (1506–1544). Hence, Queen Munjeong's policies should be seen in terms of creating political precedents rather than merely in terms of religious revival.

Next, Vladimir TIKHONOV introduces us to the life and legacy of Yi Yeoseong, a colonial intellectual whose journalism on anti-imperialist movements across the world helped to inspire and shape Korean views about their own nation and the possibilities and pitfalls of their own attempts at emancipation. The article shows Yi's remarkable achievements in conveying accurate information on what was happening in countries such as Egypt, India, or Vietnam, but is not blind to his limitations.

The article by Joon Young JUNG also deals with the colonial period, more specifically the early history of Seoul's Imperial University. The article reveals its complex beginnings and also its ambiguous and changing status within the Japanese empire.

Finally, the article by Yohan YOO takes us to Jeju island and its shamans, known locally as *simbang*. The characteristic instruments employed by the *simbang* are referred to as *mengdu*; in purely material terms they are a set of three metal instruments, i.e. knives, a bell, and a set of cups and coins, regarded as one unit. However, to the shamans and their clients the *mengdu* are not simply imbued with religious power, they actually constitute the deities on whose power the *simbang* relies. Moreover, the shamans themselves cannot

directly approach the *mengdu*. It is the smith who makes the instruments who has to invite the deities to the instruments, and who also has to conduct the initiating rite that can determine whether or not the *simbang* is worthy of using the new *mengdu*. Even though the last smith recognized for his ability in creating the *mengdu* passed away more than a decade ago, the author shows the continuing relevance of the role of the smith in understanding Jeju shamanism.

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