

Note from the Editor

In recent years, scholars have pursued new ways to complicate the divide between North and South Korea, whether in terms of film, literature, or art, often focusing on small groups of elites who previously interacted during the colonial period. One of the most interesting and promising topics relevant to this effort is classical music. With many of the earliest practitioners of a Korean classical tradition studying outside of the peninsula, while also roaming widely within the boundaries of Korea, music represents a cultural field holding numerous resonances during the colonial period, further complicated by the circumstances of division. Kim Il Sung famously recruited for the arts, seeking those prepared to contribute to the social realist tradition, and succeeded in attracting leading figures to his cause. This issue of *SJKS* finds itself fortunate to present a series of papers on these and related themes, with the core group of essays represented by a Kyujanggak workshop held in November 2023. Many of these scholars build explicitly upon the work of Keith Howard, among others, in bringing this new material to bear upon an existing subfield.¹

Starting from a panel titled “The North Korea We Know? DPRK Mass Culture from Cinema and Disability Policies to Functional Architecture and Music,” organized by Gabor Sebo, these revised essays take up a set of themes concerning cinema, sound, and access to education, topics seldom taken up in this context until now. The aim here is to open new perspectives on the North, especially through its culture industry and the resulting forms of literary and sonic output. Unsurprisingly, several of the scholars use sources from Eastern Europe, a region that frequently interacted with the North and which continues to serve as a source of newly emerging materials. Hungary, for example, figures prominently in this issue, whether in film or music.

1. Although distinct from the one that produced this special issue, Korea University held a thematically similar workshop in December 2023. Information for this event can be found at https://kstudies.info/events/show_event/186.

Special Issue: North Korea

The papers for the special issue begin with editor Gabor Sebo's introduction, in which he considers the positioning of Hungary, and more broadly Eastern Europe, with respect to North Korea in these various cultural fields. In both this piece, and his stand-alone article on North Korean film, Sebo positions Hungary's response with care, recognizing the heterogeneity of and varying interactions between Hungary and North Korea. He offers a more nuanced dialogue between cultural communities, one in which there is a shared enthusiasm but also a deeper, underlying response.

Following this introduction, Peter Moody's paper opens the special issue with North Korean music, focusing on the challenging transition from 1945 to state founding in 1948. He centers music in the formation of the North Korean project, arguing for a role in which musicians learned to locate their ambitions with reference to state directives, especially the formative ambitions of the Korean Workers' Party (KWP). More specifically, his argument centers on the earliest North Korean songs and forms of sonic celebration, especially the national anthem, which he claims were more prominent within the early state project. In this context, he points to the practices of the Soviet state and its forms of expression, even while making the case for a clearly Korean project, embedded within this grammar. Sebo's second contribution to the special issue, examining a Hungarian critique of North Korean films, complements Moody's argument. In both papers, the authors clearly mobilize a set of tensions, with the North and its socialist partners seeking common ground while prioritizing the emerging state's needs and aims in making its own revolution, whether framed in labor or cultural terms. Taking seriously the North's formative ambitions, both Moody and Sebo critique an older literature in which the North remains heavily indebted to Soviet rule, or to that of other socialist partners.

The remaining papers sustain this thematic focus: Roman Husarski looks at North Korean cinema in the Polish context; Douglas Gabriel focuses on the World Festival of Youth and Students held in Pyongyang in 1989; and Jasmine Barrett and Keith McVilly take up the question of disability and access in North Korea, one that has also received a great deal of recent attention in the South Korean context.² The majority of these essays make use of new materials, especially drawing upon Korean-language and Eastern European materials, toward depicting North Korea as it interacted with its partners and made its

2. For example, see Eunjung Kim, *Curative Violence: Rehabilitating Disability, Gender, and Sexuality in Modern Korea* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

way in the world as an early postcolonial state. These approaches may not be entirely new to Koreanists, reflecting a broader scholarly trend of recognizing the socialist world at many levels and taking its possibilities seriously, whether in the context of the early Cold War, the NK-SK ideological and material competition, or more recent trends calling for decolonization of nationalist narratives.

Additional Essays

Four papers are included in addition to the special issue. Cheolhui Lee, Hyonhui Choe, Seok-Won Lee, and CedarBough Saeji each offer insight into a variety of Korea-related subjects, tending toward the modern period. Cheolhui Lee's article on *pyeongmin* is an exception in this regard, at least nominally, although it engages with the colonial period in the construction of the very term it interrogates. Seok-Won Lee examines the South Korean academy's relationship with German social thought, and Hyonhui Choe bridges the colonial and contemporary periods while addressing the formation of an identity for South Korean literature. Finally, CedarBough Saeji examines motivations for studying Korean traditional performing arts in the twenty-first century through close observation of and interaction with a group of aspiring students.

If these four essays address various aspects of the Korean experience, loosely clustered around some conception of the formation of a canon/tradition, the book reviews that close this issue offer greater diversity. *SJKS* thanks Hyungsub Choi, Sungik Yang, Wonjung Min, and Ran Ma for their contributions. Choi and Yang touch upon similar subjects—the question of Korean industrialization spanning the colonial period and beyond. Choi's review of Yong-Chool Ha's book, *Late Industrialization, Tradition, and Social Change in South Korea*, notes a compromise of sorts, with Korean family history continuing into the contemporary period. Meanwhile, Peter Banseok Kwon's *Cornerstone of the Nation* has been generating a good deal of commentary within Korean studies circles, and we consider ourselves fortunate to have Yang's take here. We should also note that the journal continues to solicit new publications and book reviewers. Potential contributors should feel free to direct any such recommendations to members of our staff.

As we publish this edition, I want to thank all of those who work under the journal's umbrella, especially Ji Hyun Park and those who do much of the valuable work of proofreading and editing.

John P. DiMoia
Editor-in-chief

