

Note from the Editor

This edition of SJKS comes to readers amid several changes taking place both at the journal and at Kyujanggak. First, we welcome our new director (from March 2026), Professor Song Chong Lee of Religious Studies at Seoul National University, who recently accepted the position. At the same time, we say goodbye to Professor Sang Hwan Seong, who stepped down as the ICKS director in late February following a lengthy period of service. We would like to thank Prof. Seong for his many contributions as we welcome Prof. Lee to what promises to be a new direction for the journal. This edition also marks Part Two of a special issue on Religion and Korea, jointly edited by Jieun Han of Sogang University and Franklin Rausch of Lander University. Profs. Han and Rausch have contributed their own introduction addressing the three remaining papers of this two-part special issue, with a particular focus on Catholicism as practiced in Korea.

This edition of the journal features a diverse range of contributions in addition to the section devoted to the special issue. There are five articles, spanning a broad chronological range, along with four book reviews. The articles cover topics from the Joseon period, the transition from Joseon to the colonial period, and two papers with a more contemporary focus. In this last case, one article examines literature, while the other is devoted to recent news discourse since the 1990s. I mention this range to emphasize the ongoing growth of the broader field, which continues to exhibit strengths in both new and more traditional areas of inquiry. My impression is that North American programs have shifted toward a stronger focus on Korean culture (film, literature, and media), which is understandable given the enormous popularity of Korean cultural production. In contrast, South Korea continues to maintain a strong historical focus, especially on the Joseon and colonial periods.

The first two articles reflect this historical focus, beginning with Jongwoo Yi's examination of late eighteenth-century Joseon, and the Tangpyeong Policy. The measure, designed to draw upon available sources of talent regardless of

social class and, perhaps more importantly, regardless of political affiliation, aimed to reduce factionalism. As Yi illustrates, there was considerable disagreement concerning the scope of this policy prior to its implementation, and the article explores the different possibilities. Following this, an article co-authored by Virginia Rueda Gonzalez, Aurelia Martín Casares, and Antonio J. Domenech of the University of Málaga addresses the question of *jamae nobi* (자매노비), or “debt slaves.” These individuals, often affected by environmental crises and natural disasters, sometimes found it necessary to sell themselves as part of a process of migration in order to recover from economic hardship. As Rueda Gonzalez et al. argue, this “survival strategy” reveals much about displacement, precarity, and subsistence conditions in what was a largely agrarian society.

Vladimir Tikhonov’s article, “Kim Jeongha (1898–1938), an ‘Unreliable’ Revolutionary,” takes us to the transitional period spanning late Joseon and much of the colonial era. The title figure, connected to the Shanghai faction, places Korean nationalists turned Communists in tension with broader Communist interests, in this case the Comintern. Kim worked extensively in China and the Russian Far East before ultimately being purged in the late 1930s after encountering problems with his Soviet counterparts. Through this material, Tikhonov simultaneously captures Korean agency and the constraints imposed by the Soviet system, underscoring how priorities shifted over time. I should also mention that Prof. Tikhonov will also guest-edit a special issue of the journal in a future edition, scheduled as a follow-up to an earlier iteration of the annual Kyujanggak symposium.

The final two papers consider contemporary topics, including literature and political discourse. Leilei Ye offers an analysis of the novels of Park Wan-seo, a Korean writer known for her close engagement with the Korean War, its aftermath, and especially the implications of social change for the lives of Korean women. Ye’s article focuses on the critique of nature within Park’s oeuvre, particularly the ecological devastation produced by a narrow vision of Korean developmentalism. In a sense, the eco-critical approach offered here intersects effectively with the gender themes present in Park’s novels and also echoes much of the newer scholarship in Korean studies, where environmental history and STS together represent a growing subfield. Ye develops this argument by juxtaposing the language of “topophobia” with its opposite, “topophilia,” leaving room for an imaginative rendering of landscapes damaged by, or lost to, the corrosive force of the Park Chung Hee era’s development.

Oul Han’s paper examines the language of democracy by looking at four major Korean daily newspapers and the recurring appearance of various tropes and themes over a period of about thirty years. Using this survey data, Han

explores the formation of stable institutions and practices through the negotiation of contested terms. Han refers to this process as “emotional institutionalization” and seeks to document the transformation of “emotional framings into durable discursive structures.” Alongside these five papers, the issue also includes three book notes, again aiming to cover a broad range of topics and historical periods. Here, the journal would also like to remind readers of its mission to place newly published Korean studies materials in conversation across national and regional contexts. Thus, we are always open to reviewing new book publications and welcome inquiries from potential reviewers.

As I reach four years in my tenure at the journal, I once again want to thank our staff, copy editors, proofreaders, and contributors as we bring readers this latest edition of SJKS.

John P. DiMoia
Editor-in-chief

