

New Research on Everyday Life
in North Korea

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The feature articles in the September 2024 (Vol. 10, No. 2) issue of S/N Korean Humanities add a new complement to the exploration of everyday life in North Korea, based on changes in the country's gender and food culture.

The first article by Hye-ok Lee (University of North Korean Studies) examines the developmental factors and constraints of gender equality that can be derived from the experiences of the respective systems and residents of North and South Korea by comparing the origins, characteristics, and results of “gender equality” and “expansion of women's rights” formalized in both Koreas during the “period of system establishment” from the mid-1950s to the 1960s. In North Korea, despite the early promulgation of the Gender Equality Law, the abolition of “feudal male superiority,” and the transformation of women into the working class, “socialist male superiority” persisted, and women's social status was not improved significantly. In South Korea, actions to advance women's rights were driven from below by women activists and campaigners of a nature that did not exist in North Korea, but the ideal of “wise mother and good wife” that had prevailed since before liberation persisted despite economic and social development. In both North and South Korea, the path of economic development during the period of system consolidation was such that patriarchy was maintained and strengthened in a transformed form, rather than weakened. Ultimately, regardless of the differences in systems, the gender culture and order in North and South Korea showed limitations in terms of post-patriarchy. The question of how to overcome this in the future will be a key task in envisioning gender equality for a unified Korea.

The second article by Maria Osetrova (Institute of China and Contemporary Asia) examines how and when Pyongyang Raengmyon has been made into a North Korean national food symbol and explores the reasons behind this process. A dish of buckwheat noodles in cold broth (*raengmyŏn*) has existed in Korean diet at least for several centuries and was mainly spread in the northern regions of the peninsula. However, in the situation of national division in the latter half of the 1980s, the DPRK realized the need to elaborate its independent vision of cultural authenticity in the sphere of national cuisine and

to construct its own national food symbol. This is how the name Pyongyang Raengmyon has been actively promoted in the North Korean media and propaganda sources since the late 1980s until today. The combination of the dish's name (*raengmyŏn*) with the name of the North Korean capital city was intended to form a clear and strong link between Korean cuisine and the DPRK. The case of Pyongyang Raengmyon as an example of the North Korean national food symbol construction is not only interesting in its own right but also illustrates how food issues can serve as an instrument of ideology and cultural politics of a country.

The feature articles are followed by Soyoung Lee (Jeju National University)'s book review of *Pip'anjŏk 4·3 yŏn'gu* [A Critical Study of the April 3 Incident] written by Ko Sung-man et al. It is a rare and valuable work that aims to find and listen to the "silenced voices" and generate questions to consciously move away from the monolithic "dark to light" schema of historical settlement (*kwagŏsa ch'ŏngsan*). This book goes beyond a case-history-centered approach and crosses over various disciplines such as law, political science, sociology, and literature to examine the "Jeju April 3 Incident" and the "post-Jeju April 3 Incident" in the context of the Cold War, decolonization, diaspora, and developmentalism.

The September 2024 issue of *S/N Korean Humanities* is concluded by an interview with Professor Jae-Jung Suh (Department of Politics and International Studies at International Christian University, Japan) by Professor Kim Chongkon (Institute of Humanities for Unification, Konkuk University). In the interview, Professor Suh discusses the inter-Korean relations, arms race in East Asia, and the US-ROK alliance and emphasizes the need for mutual understanding to pave the way for peace on the Korean peninsula.

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