

# “New Scholarship on Korea-Japan Relations”

**Kim Sung-Min**  
Editor-in-Chief



The September 2020 issue (Vol. 6, No. 2) of *S/N Korean Humanities* coincides with the nadir of bilateral relations between Korea and Japan. In the last two years, the governments in Seoul and Tokyo have been at odds with each other over multilayered issues ranging from wartime sexual and labor slavery to trade and military disputes. The domestic politics of each country has hardened the lens of nationalism dominating the management of bilateral affairs. In our promotion of inter-Korean reconciliation for regional peace and stability, the Institute of Humanities for Unification (IHU) at Konkuk University is convinced that the current crisis in Korea-Japan relations is what precisely calls for more efforts on the part of scholars to continue our dialogue in the search for mutual understanding and a way forward for the peoples of the two countries, if not governments. In this vein, the feature articles under the special theme “New Scholarship on Korea-Japan Relations” present the latest cutting-edge analysis of the past, present, and future of the bilateral relationship conducted by seasoned as well as up-and-coming experts in the field. They illumine the causes of the continued impasse using new theoretical and methodological frameworks, and also propose alternative conceptual pathways to cooperation.

The first article by Hara Yusuke (Doshisha University) examines how the March First Movement was understood in Japanese literature in an attempt to shed light on the various historical meanings of the March First Movement. Nakanishi Inosuke, the author discussed in this article, is a rare Japanese writer who recognized the historical nature of the March First Movement as a fundamental protest against colonial rule. This article concentrates on Inosuke’s *Futei Senjin* [The Unscrupulous Korean], and examines the meaning of this provocative title. Originally, the term “Futei Senjin” began to be used by the Japanese colonial power, which defined Koreans who resisted Japanese colonial rule as “evil terrorists.” However, the March First Movement precipitated the rapid expansion of the term, from Chosŏn Korea to the colonial center. In the early 1920s, this term was widely recognized in the colonial center, creating an extremely negative and dehumanized image of the Korean people. In this vein, the term “Futei Senjin” can be characterized as an amalgam of the frightening, repulsive images of colonial

Korea held by the Japanese during this period. Such images eventually led to the indiscriminate massacre of Koreans by the Japanese people amidst the chaos following the Great Kantō Earthquake in September 1923. Between the March First Movement and Great Kantō Earthquake, Nakanishi warned of the dangers of these distorted images of Koreans shared by the Japanese in his anti-colonial novella *Futei Senjin* [The Unscrupulous Korean], a warning that has yet to lose its validity in the current Japanese society filled with anti-Korean discourse.

The second article by Seiko Mimaki (Takasaki City University of Economics) sheds light on how the active engagement of societal actors have added new dynamism to “comfort women” activism, which has brought de-territorialization of the issue with the spread of the “comfort women” statues beyond Korea, and transformed the issue from national tragedy to a universal human rights issue. Though “victimhood nationalism” is still strong in Korean society today, which prevents the Korean people from coming to terms with its dark history of victimizing others, there has been an emerging trend of transcending simple victimhood narratives related to the “comfort women.” In mutual visits of the victims between Korea and Vietnam commemorating seventy years of Korea’s liberation and fifty years of Korea’s sending soldiers to Vietnam, we can see that memories of victimhood do not necessarily lead to a perpetual cycle of hate and anger. Since 2019, Japan-Korea bilateral relations have deteriorated to the point called “the worst in the post-war period.” Still we can find many grassroots efforts to maintain people-to-people’s ties between the two countries, especially revived feminist networks pushed by the rise of #MeToo movement in the mid of heightened diplomatic tension in the summer of 2019, which could pave the way for societal reconciliation.

The last article by Mikyoung Kim (Independent Scholar, Ph.D. in Sociology) interweaves Japan’s human rights attitudes toward North Korea with indigenous Shinto religion. Normative claims of universal rights protection demand demystification from a careful contextualization where the norms are confronted with ‘lived’ violations. This research analyzes the way in which abduction of Japanese citizens and

the problem of Chosŏn school are intertwined against the backdrop of ethnocentric Shinto ethos. This analysis contests the rhetoric that all human beings are equal and born with inalienable rights irrespective of time and places. Shintoism, the primary cultural fabric in Japan, justifies ethnic hierarchy and prioritization in responsibility to protect in the name of communal tradition. The violation of the rights of Chosŏn school and preoccupation with abduction of citizens demonstrate a useful contrast. This research concludes by calling for more studies on subtler manifestation of 'lived human rights' as a reflection of religious ethos.

The special theme articles are followed by a review of *Friend: A Novel from North Korea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020) by Amanda Wright (Ewha Womans University). The first novel by a North Korean author (Paek Nam-nyong) to be translated in English (by Immanuel Kim, George Washington University), the book has received attention from the United States and Europe as well as elsewhere in Asia, for the glimpse it provides into the notoriously closed society. On its surface, *Friend: A Novel from North Korea*, is perfectly pleasant and can be enjoyed by any fan of fiction—a story of love and divorce with an affable protagonist judge to guide us. But the first novel to be sanctioned for English translation by Pyongyang, it also offers interesting themes. Both the breaking of and adherence to traditional gender roles, a relatively balanced discussion of divorce, nature and the arts, as well as more subtle propaganda than one might expect from such a piece. These will be examined in turn, followed by speculation on the timing of this release.

The September issue is concluded by an interview section, which was newly added to *S/N Korean Humanities* starting with the March 2020 issue (Vol. 6, No. 1). Since 2016, a series of interviews has been conducted by the members of the IHU with the most prominent thinkers, researchers, and policy-makers whose thought, research, or professional achievements in dealing with the issues of inter-Korean division and reconciliation have a special connection to the conceptual and methodological advancement of Humanities for Unification. The IHU published these interviews in *Han'guk chisŏngwaui t'ongil taedam* [Unification Discussions

with Korea's Erudite Scholars] in 2018. The editorial board of *S/N Korean Humanities* decided to publish their translations in English starting with the March 2020 issue. By making their insights available in English, the IHU hopes to engage with a wider international readership in future discussions on inter-Korean division and unification based on the humanities perspective. Relying on the humanities will allow us to contemplate the past, present, and future of unification as a *process* led by *all Korean people* including the Korean diaspora, which is a shift from focusing on the political elites, systems, and institutions of just South or North Korea. To mark the launch of the new section, we began with an interview with the renowned historian Dr. Kang Mangil. The second in the series in the current issue presents an interview with Dr. Paik Nak-chung, one of Korea's most eloquent political and cultural critics. Dr. Paik Nak-chung is most distinctively recognized for elucidating the structural dimensions of the Korean problem with the notion of the "division system."

Since the inception in March 2015, *S/N Korean Humanities* has played a unique bridge-building role between the worlds of *Han'gukhak* and *Chosŏnhak* in the promotion of "Integrated Korean Studies." Despite the downward spiral in Korea-Japan relations and the stalemated peace process between the two Koreas, the way forward for scholars is to look for a sustainable foundation for mutual recognition and dialogue. In our commitment to this mission, *S/N Korean Humanities* will continue to reinvent itself as a forum of debate for a humanities-based approach to unification and Korean studies that illuminates the interplay of commonalities and differences in the Korean peoples' attitudes, emotions, values, and identities.

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Editor-in-Chief  
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