

Rethinking Diasporic Identity  
in *S/N Korean Humanities*

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The March 2021 issue (Vol. 7, No. 1) of *S/N Korean Humanities* situates the examination of Korean diasporic identity within the unique framework of integrated Korean Studies between *han'gukhak* and *chosŏnhak*. Since our inception in 2009, the Institute of Humanities for Unification (IHU) has pioneered the reconceptualization of unification as a process of communication, healing, and integration of South and North Koreans as well as Korean diaspora whose experiences and ideas related to “Koreanness” are grounded in the histories and realities specific to each community. Our nuanced approach to Korean diasporic identity has sought to elucidate the plurality, complexity, and hybridity of S/ N Korean identities. While hypernationalist framing may not sufficiently account for the reconfiguration of Korean diasporic identities in many situations, there are cases where it may still be highly relevant. The special theme articles in the March 2021 issue employ either transnationalist and/ or nationalist perspectives depending on the particular circumstances to shed light on the past, present, and future of Korean diaspora in all its richness and diversity.

The first article by Kim Chinmi (Korea University of Japan) examines the characteristics of Korean-Japanese students’ understanding of unification through their written works that received prizes in a student writing contest, which has been conducted for more than forty years as part of ethnonational education of Korean students in Japan. In this study, middle- and high school students’ works (from 1978 to 2016) were selected as its subjects. Of the 1,485 works, 209 (14 percent) are related to unification issues, and these 209 works were in turn classified into seven categories according to the subject. By focusing on the trends and changes in the times that emerge from the students’ understanding of unification, this study found that division and unification must be considered when students problematize their existence amid the continuing colonialist policies in Japan and the division structure. In addition, despite the strengthening of the framework for recognizing North and South Korea as separate nations within Japan’s consciousness of the Korean Peninsula, the Korean students in Japan appear to have always looked

forward to a unified Korea. This may be because the need for unification has been regarded as a matter of self-reliance by the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan and within ethno-national education spaces, in which bodies have always engaged in and forwarded unification movements despite opposition from extremely conservative forces that seek to maintain the status quo.

The second article by Irina Lyan (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem) brings a transnational approach to the concept of diasporic nationalism, often narrowly conceptualized through the paradoxical link between displaced nation and territory. Based on a one-year ethnographical account of the Korean Christian community in Jerusalem, the article aims to challenge the already troubled concept of diasporic nationalism through the prism of a religious supranational “homecoming” to the Holy Land that might both enhance the national identity and transcend the very significance of nation and nationalism. Rather than viewing diasporic individuals as brokers, educators, and even as “exemplary citizens” or ambassadors of their historical homelands, the article suggests moving away from a “hypernationalist” framing of diaspora as an extended nation toward a nuanced understanding of diasporic action and agency. By juxtaposing national and religious nostalgia for “imagined homelands,” the research argues that while national identity makes Korean community members outsiders in an unwelcoming Israeli society, their status as Christians brings them back to their religious origins through what the author calls an “academic pilgrimage.” The article asks how the Korean Christian community, modeled on the concept of nation-within-nation, negotiates its multiple identities and porous national and religious boundaries that can reinforce, overlap, or contradict one another both inwardly and outwardly.

The last article by German Kim (Al-Farabi Kazakh National University) is one of the first steps in studying Korean folk dances in the USSR and CIS influenced by northern and southern styles from historical point of view. After the division of Korea into two states, there appeared a significant

difference in the folk-dance performing styles between the North and the South. At the beginning, the traditional culture and art of the Soviet Koreans was the influence of North Korea. It can be explained by the diplomatic relations, economic cooperation, and cultural exchange between the Soviet Union and the DPRK only, excluding the Republic of Korea. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the South seized the initiative in the issue of promoting ties between the post-Soviet Koreans and their ethnic homeland, even though their ancestors, in the overwhelming majority, came from the northern provinces of the Korean Peninsula. The article deals with the old folk dances (*minsok muyong*), excluding court dances (*kungjung muyong*), and “new” dances (*shin muyong*) developed in 1920s and modern dances (*kūndae muyong*). Based on varied original sources and long personal observations, the article analyzes the folk dances of the divided Korea represented in the repertoires of professional, semiprofessional, and amateur Korean dance groups in Central Asia.

The special theme articles are followed by a review of *Retch'ŭ t'ongil: ch'iyu-wa t'onghap* [Let's Unify! Healing and Integration] and *Retch'ŭ t'ongil: p'yŏnghwa-wa sot'ong* [Let's Unify! Peace and Communication], a textbook series on unification for elementary school students written by IHU faculty and students. Kim Hyemi (Hallym Institute for Life and Death Studies) looks into how the series talks about peace and unification to children, the generation who obviously neither experienced the war nor was directly affected by those who experienced the war. The series emphasize that unification must be reconceptualized as a process of communication, healing, and integration of South and North Koreans as well as Korean diaspora. In the *Let's Unify!* series, the beginning of unification is not focused on security or system-oriented unification education, but rather on peace and feelings about peace that are easily accessible from the perspective of elementary school students. In such a way, *Let's Unify!* consists of learning the value of peace in everyday life and developing a sensitivity toward peace. The series provides a map that leads children to a deeper exploration of

thoughts that would enable unification.

The March 2021 issue is concluded by an interview section, which was newly added to *S/N Korean Humanities* starting in March 2020. These interviews are translated from IHU's 2018 publication of *Han'guk chisŏng-gwa'ui t'ongil taedam* [Unification Discussions with Korea's Erudite Scholars], which features our conversations with some of the most influential thinkers, researchers, and policy makers committed to the study and/or management of inter-Korean relations based on the humanities. To mark the launch of the new section, we began with the renowned historian Dr. Kang Man-gil, followed by an interview with Dr. Paik Nak-chung. The current issue presents our interview with Dr. Han S. Park, Professor Emeritus of International Affairs at the University of Georgia and recipient of the Gandhi, King, Ikeda Community Builders Prize in 2010.

By reconsidering diasporic identity within the unique framework of integrated Korean studies, paving the way for the education of unification tailored to children, and revisiting a diasporic intellectual's dedication to inter-Korean peace, the March 2021 issue of *S/N Korean Humanities* is proud to continue the IHU's mission to bridge the worlds of *han'gukhak* and *chosŏnhak*. Despite the current low point in inter-Korean relations at the official level, the IHU remains convinced that the search for commonalities and mutual understanding must proceed forward because peace is shaped not by government policy alone but also by people's aspirations and ideas. By promoting integrated Korean studies, the IHU hopes to transform how people think about what it means to be *Korean* and what it means to seek *unification* by facilitating communication, healing, and integration.

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