



Special Feature

Korean Literature: Foreign Perspectives

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Editor's Note

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In the past, the *Review of Korean Studies* (hereafter, *RKS*) published many studies focusing on Korean literature and even hosted group studies that included articles on the theme. There was an article among contributions that were published under the name of “15th century Korean Peninsula: Splendor in Diversity” in the June 2019 issue, and we also invited some works to be published under the theme of “History and Literature of Joseon: Foreign Perspectives” for the December issue of the same year. Ever since we tried to return to the topic of literature, and we also wanted to examine it through the foreign scholars’ perspective, but unfortunately it was not an easy task, and in the meantime, we had to turn to other areas of Korean studies that also needed our attention. Over the course of several issues, we hosted special studies under the theme of philosophy and religion (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism) and invited splendid studies on Korean Music and Korean Art through separate occasions, while biding time for Korean literature.

Then finally in 2022, we were able to invite several dedicated scholars to contribute to a Literature-themed Special Studies project, under the name of “Korean Literature: Foreign Perspectives.” Four topics were suggested by the authors, and we at the *RKS* were more than grateful and honored to welcome them.

Professor Marion Eggert of the Ruhr University Bochum and co-author Elsa Kueppers (Ph.D. candidate, Bochum) contributed an article named “Metaphorical Figurations of Transcendence in 16th Century Literati *Gasa*.” Discussed here is the use of metaphor in 16th century Korean *Gasa* poems from Joseon literati. The authors identify true metaphoricity from *Gasa* poems entitled “Myeonangjeongga” and “Gwandong byeolgok” and suggest that the metaphoricity creates a sense of transcendence. By doing so they argue the existence of an immanence-transcendence distinction in those Confucian texts. According to them, conceptualizations of transcendence that can be witnessed

in both poems may not be regarded as religious, but they do show a discernable religious dimension and demonstrate exquisite examples of creativity.

Professor Dennis Wuerthner of the Boston University contributed an article under the title “Unhappy Confucians, Take Heed! Reading Seoljam Kim Siseup’s *Geumo sinhwa* as Anti-Religious Propaganda-Fiction.” The author examines Kim Siseup’s renowned collection of strange tales (“New Tales of the Golden Turtle”). While reminding us that Kim was a Confucian prodigy who once threw himself into religion only to regret it, the author recommends regarding *Geumo sinhwa* as a cautionary, anti-religious propaganda-fiction meant for the next generation of Neo-Confucian students who were getting increasing comfortable with Buddhism. It is also suggested that the creation of *Geumo sinhwa* was an extension of a state-level effort against the Buddhism’s revival, as *Geumo sinhwa* was widely circulated throughout the Joseon society without causing Kim any trouble.

Professor Ji-Eun Lee of the Washington University in St. Louis contributed an article named “Continued Journey: Women’s Travel *Kasa* in Early Twentieth Century Korea.” Jo Ayeong’s travelogue “A Travel to Diamond Mountains” (1930) is examined here to explore themes like gender and modernity, community and individuality, and tradition and modern, featured in a literary genre in the wake of Korea’s transition to modernity. The author suggests that, to gain an adequate understanding of the era, it is imperative to try to look beyond stereotypes or slogans such as “New Women” and “Wise Mother Good Wife.” The author also examines other travelogues of the time written by women and comes to the conclusion that the women writers’ writings embody their efforts to adapt to given situations and exemplify their successes and frustrations.

Professor Antonetta L. Bruno of Sapienza University of Rome contributed an article under the title “Verisimilitudes between Novels and *Musok*: Exploring Narrative Characteristics.” According to the author, voices of ancestral beings or other souls play a pivotal role in storytelling, as we can see from both novels and shamanistic rituals meant for them. The author explores narrative characteristics (verisimilitudes) shared by contemporary novels and Korean shamanism (*musok*) and suggests that these narratives, those from the novelists and from the *mudang* figures alike, reveal unique understanding of the temporal and spatial dimensions. The author found such traces from both real-life oracle sessions and a couple of renowned Korean novels published since the 1980s and asks for the active participation of the readers in interpreting them.

We at the *RKS* cannot express our gratitude enough to the authors who graciously agreed to share their expertise through their contributions. Their creative approaches and perspectives expand the realm of possibilities that any scholar engaged in Korean literature studies around the world should try to consider in their future works. An occasion like this Special Studies project really makes us think that Korean scholars and foreign scholars should talk with each other more and exchange their opinions with each other on a regular basis. The *RKS*, as always, will keep endeavoring to be the most ideal and inducive vessel to serve that very function.