



**Special Review**

# Recent Korean Studies in Japan

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## Editor's Note

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The *Review of Korean Studies* (hereafter, *RKS*) always tried to present professional reviews of outstanding studies in Koreanology, conducted by both Korean and foreign scholars. In many cases such studies happened to be those from Korean scholars, but works from foreign scholars also graced our pages. The Special Review section for this December issue is an extension of efforts to host cases of the latter, but this time we specifically chose to review Korean studies performed by no other than Japanese scholars.

In terms of foreign scholars' works featured in English-language journals published in Korea, European and American works were the ones which received most attention as well as higher appreciations. Such reception was probably due to the fact that European and American academic circles were the ones that launched Korean studies in English outside Korea in the first place. Over the years, however, the community of foreign scholars primarily using English yet engaged in Korean studies has expanded well beyond the boundaries of Europe and U.S., and the nature of their works are as diverse as the authors' own nationalities. Presentation of a proper review of their works in an English-based journal is not only in order but even overdue.

Yet before venturing into reviewing works of scholars from a variety of countries other than U.S. and Europe (which we certainly plan to do in the near future), there are not one but two countries whose body of works we may have to prioritize in our reviews above other works from other countries, and those countries are no other than China and Japan. The historical relationship Korea had with these two countries is more than well-known and not to mention distinctively important, and naturally these two countries' scholarly examination of Korean history and culture began well before any European or American scholars ever decided to do. In response, Korean scholars as well have been reviewing their works for decades if not centuries, and have communicated with scholars from both countries. But displaying in English the Koreans' own evaluation and critical assessment of current Japanese and

Chinese historiography on Korean history and culture has been a project that was yet to be conceived let alone come to a fruition. Come to think of it, boosting academic discussion among Korean, Chinese, and Japanese scholars in English would not only be good for advancing a mutual understanding of East Asian history among the three countries, but be effective in sharing such understanding with the entire Western world. And the merit of such efforts is obvious, as it would go a long way for them to create a new kind of global understanding of the Asian culture in general. Such efforts should have begun a long time ago. But I guess better late than never.

So, we at the *RKS* finally decided to do something about it, and in launching such efforts, for the first effort ever we decided to present four Japanese books as the object of review in this special occasion.

Regarding Ancient history of Korea, Hashimoto Shigeru's *A Study of Ancient Korean Wooden Documents* 韓国古代の木簡の研究 was chosen. And concerning Korea's Medieval period, in this case the Goryeo (918-1392) and Joseon (1392-1910) periods, Toyoshima Yuka's *Goryeo Court Rituals and the Influence of the Relationship with China* 高麗王朝の儀礼と中国 and Tsuji Yamato's *Joseon Dynasty's Policies of Trade with China and the Ming-Qing Transition* 朝鮮王朝の対中貿易政策と明清交替 were respectively chosen for reviews. And finally, for the Modern period of Korea, not a book authored by a single scholar but a collection of individual works entitled *Knowledge and Power of the Colonial Empire Japan* 植民地帝国日本における知と権力 (edited by Matsuda Toshihiko) was chosen for review. While the former three books relay to us the author's unique, personalized opinion and perspectives, the final one is expected to provide us with a wide range of interesting aspects displayed by Imperialist Japan, with which Joseon Korea had the misfortune to deal with firsthand.

As can be seen by the contents of these books, all the authors involved in the creation of them are evidently promising Japanese scholars who have been engaged in meaningful Korean studies for quite some time. The topics they are dealing with are certainly distinctive and genuinely important.

For example, "wooden documents" were carriers of important information in the ancient days, even after paper was put into good use. They served a variety of functions not only in the Korean ancient but medieval days as well, so a systemic survey and not to mention extensive evaluation would be imperative in advancing ancient historical studies. State rituals concerning important dynastic figures (kings, queens, or emissaries) served as cornerstones in the governance of

medieval dynastic ruling, so in that regard all the rituals and protocols employed in the past do provide us with detailed knowledge of how the people at the time viewed other countries as well as their own selves. Meanwhile, studies of trades between Joseon and the Ming & Qing period China has always been an integral part of historical literature on the Korean peninsula's foreign economic exchanges, so they should be further performed by even more scholars. And the status and nature of Joseon Korea under Japanese ruling has always been at the center of passionate debates inside Korea. Considering today's diplomatic climate in the Korea-Japan relationship, as well as the ever-diverging domestic opinions on how to evaluate the 20th century's early half in Korean history, an open debate digging deeper into the reality of this period should always be a welcomed one.

So, these books were all chosen for a reason. They were recognized as exemplary bodies of work that could contribute to either expanding the scope of discussion in Koreanology or bring fresh perspectives to the existing state of discussion.

Yet merely presenting the contents of these studies to foreign readers was hardly this project's original intention. The real objective behind this project's conception was to notify and inform readers (as well as scholars with similar interests all around the world) of how the new generation of Korean scholars have been monitoring such neighboring state's studies, what they have to say of the works of their Japanese counterparts, and ultimately how their own works (Korean works) differ from them (Japanese works) in terms of perspectives, interpretation, and evaluation. And to serve such purpose, the *RKS* sought out for and invited four outstanding Korean scholars, who have well presented themselves as Koreanology scholars over the years, to provide extensive reviews for the aforementioned books.

Doctor Oh Taek-hyun from Dongguk University agreed to provide us with a review on Hashimoto Shigeru's book, while Doctor Park Yunmi from the Institute of Korean Studies (Yonsei University) generously delivered a review on Toyoshima Yuka's work. Doctor Kim Kyeong Lok from the Institute for Military History (MND, South Korea) agreed to contribute a review on Tsuji Yamato's book, while Professor Hong Jong-wook from the Institute of Humanities (Seoul National University) contributed a review on the aforementioned collection of articles, which he himself joined and contributed to.

All these four reviewers have been actively engaged in Korean studies across a number of important areas. Doctor Oh has been an integral part of a group of Korean scholars who for years have focused on Korean wooden documents. Doctor Park is an expert in Goryeo state rituals and is more than qualified to offer a critical review on any work (either Korean or Japanese) based on related subjects. Doctor Kim is extremely well versed in not only trade-related issues but diplomatic relations among East Asian countries, and delivered a probing review that fits his credentials. Professor Hong has studied in Japan for a long time, and during that time equipped himself with firsthand knowledge and experience of studies, goals, and aspirations of contemporary Japanese scholars.

In their respective reviews, they all highlighted the merits and accomplishments of the books mentioned above, but they also pointed out things that are missing from such works, and tried to ascertain what would have prompted such problems. Most importantly, they presented their own takes on the subject matter, which were also accompanied by several suggestions that should be contemplated on in the future, by Korean and Japanese scholars alike.

The *RKS* is exploring new avenues in academic reviews. Not only books and articles but academic events as well as vestiges and artifacts will all be the object of future reviews. Only by doing so the full range of studies and surveys currently underway by various members of Korean academic circles dedicated to studies of Korean history and culture could be properly appreciated. This December 2019 issue's Special Review section is the second effort in that vein (following the Special Review section of the last June 2019 issue), and we cannot be more proud of the occasion. The *RKS* extends its humblest gratitude to all four reviewers for sharing with us their expertise and determination, which made this project not only possible but special.