



Special Feature

15th century Korean Peninsula:
Splendor in Diversity

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Editor's Note

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The nature of Korean culture is diverse. One would have to be versed in quite a lot of areas to truly appreciate its splendor. There is language, there is literature, and there are also other areas like architecture, music, and science, just to name a few. A lot of attention had been naturally required, so countless scholars—either Korean or foreign—have been engaged in Korean Studies for decades, if not centuries.

As an academic journal publishing Korean Studies written in English, the *Review of Korean Studies* has been publishing works of foreign scholars more than those of Korean scholars, not necessarily intentionally or even consciously. Of course, Korean scholars' works also regularly and consistently graced the pages of the journal, but the overall number of them was comparatively smaller than that of foreign works. This may not have been a problem when domestic Korean Studies by modern scholars were in its infancy, like half a century ago, but today, the landscape of Korean Studies in Korea is vastly different. In their own steadily accumulating studies, Korean scholars have revealed unique perspectives through a variety of themes, which do not overlap with topics usually discussed in studies by foreign scholars.

The unfortunate nature of the current state is that scholars overseas are not very well aware of what kind of studies are going on inside Korea itself, which all may agree should be considered as the homeland of all Korean Studies. As much as Korean scholars would benefit from learning what kind of studies are going on in foreign academic circles, foreign scholars could also find themselves inspired by Korean scholars' works that have been developing separately from their foreign counterparts.

So, it seems rather obvious that further communication between Korean and foreign scholars is not only necessary but required, and a sense of urgency in that regard was what brought about the very inception of this project. We at the *Review of Korean Studies* decided to publish superb papers on Korean Studies done by Korean scholars in English translation, and in the form of a special

group study, and most importantly on a regular basis. And because we figured that mere translations of old bodies of work or current trend reviews in English may fall short of the original spirit behind this task, we invited five renowned scholars of Korean Linguistics, Literature, Music, Medicine, and Architecture, and asked them to contribute fresh works which would reflect not only their past achievements but their most recent academic ideas as well.

So here we are, presenting a collection of studies from five different scholars who have been publishing outstanding works in their own areas of expertise for the past couple of decades. And to launch this new endeavor, we chose the 15th century as the background period of the project. Considering the nature of this century, which was the center stage for Korean medieval civilization that bridged the past 13th-14th centuries with the following 16th-17th centuries, it felt more than appropriate to kickstart a series of special studies with a project concentrating on this particular century. Hopefully it would be the first of many special study projects to meet the aforementioned need in the future.

Prof. Sim Kyungho from Korea University examined how a specific trend of academism that could be labelled as “Fundamental Studies” (to facilitate the spreading of classical Chinese literature in Joseon) was formed during the reign of Joseon King Sejong. He also surveyed what kind of classical texts the Joseon people were able to translate and publish, attached with a complete set of annotation and commentary, thanks to such academism. According to Prof. Sim, establishing correct and official Korean pronunciation of Chinese letters, and thus securing proper translation of Chinese texts in the Korean alphabet *hangeul*, was an important step that had to be taken in the overall effort of renovating Joseon-based Chinese studies. And he also noted that such effort proceeded vigorously during King Sejong’s reign under that king’s most diligent care.

Prof. Park Jinho from Seoul National University examined 15th century Korean (Hunmin jeongeum, or *hangeul*) grammar, from a viewpoint of linguistic typology and historical grammar. Of course, a rather vast amount of data on 15th century Korean grammar has always been available for linguists and historians interested in its characteristics as that particular century was when *hangeul* was developed, yet Prof. Park seems to have his own take on how they should be analyzed in the future. He argues that studies so far have mainly been conducted from an “internal perspective,” and reveals his intentions to employ

certain linguistic methods, which he described as “external perspectives” (such as linguistic typology and diachronic studies), in his paper. He hopes such methods will be able to provide us with additional information regarding the nature of the 15th century Korean tense-aspect system, which would include functions of tense-aspect markers and alternation patterns of morphemes by transitivity.

Prof. Song Hye-jin examined 15th century Joseon musical trends through the records of a musician and intellectual named Seong Hyeon, who was a renowned figure in the history of early Joseon music, and most importantly the author of *Akhakgwebeom*. According to Prof. Song, Seong’s lifetime of efforts as well as the contents of his book reveal what kind of musical aspiration Joseon leaders and literati had in this particular period. She also noted that while Confucian Chinese ritual music began to prosper in this period, a new ritual music was also composed based upon *hyangak* and became an integral part of performance pieces used in ritual and banquet music. This effectively demonstrates the Joseon people’s interest in playing traditional music (alongside Chinese Confucian music) at dynastic rituals and musical occasions.

Prof. Kim Seongsu from the Institute of Humanities at Seoul National University examined King Sejong’s healthcare policies in the early Joseon years. According to Prof. Kim, prior conventions of distributing medical services and medicinal materials were reorganized to meet new societal needs, as the leaders of Joseon intended medicine and healthcare to play a role that would facilitate the new dynasty’s foremost political agenda of ruling the people in the Kingly Way and through the spirit of benevolence. Throughout the article he examines how the public’s accessibility to medical services increased through new employment of agencies and personnel dedicated to public medical care. He also noted that the field of medicine in general was reinvigorated by extensive academic research, and culminated in the publication of a variety of medical texts.

Prof. Lee Woo-Jong from Yeungnam University examined architectural designs of 15th century Joseon wooden structures. In order to explore how such designs were developed with notable characteristics, he surveyed several representative structures from both the first and second halves of that century, and focused upon certain aspects such as joints and decorations of the framing components as well as their position. While structures from the 15th century’s earlier half revealed some styles and characteristics inherited from the late Goryeo dynasty, those from the century’s latter half continued to develop and

form main features of Joseon architectural design. Prof. Lee determined that those two styles were actually in the process of being converged, and while elaborating on such evolution he also tried to establish the rationale behind such transformation.

All these studies represent some of the finest Korean Studies to date. Of course, there are also other outstanding scholars in the field, whose works we'll hopefully be able to introduce to you in the future, but I believe these initial five studies will be more than sufficient to make you realize the complexity of Korean culture, as well as appreciate the diverse nature of Korean scholars' works. My heartfelt gratitude goes out to all five scholars who graciously agreed to join this project. And I welcome all readers to enjoy these gifted scholars' most recent accomplishments.