

The Korean Diaspora Across the World

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Guest Editor

The present special issue of *Asian Studies* examines the growth and diversification of the Korean diaspora in recent years, with communities emerging in various parts of the world, particularly in the United States, Canada, Japan, and Australia. This expansion has been driven by factors such as globalization, economic opportunities, and educational pursuits. Researchers have focused on understanding the cultural, social, and economic impacts of these communities in their host countries, as well as their connections to South Korea. In addition to the conventional migratory narratives, recent studies have emphasized the experiences of second-, third-, and even fourth-generation Korean immigrants. These individuals often grapple with multifaceted identities, attempting to reconcile their Korean heritage with the cultural norms of their host countries. Research suggests that these generations play a pivotal role in shaping the future of Korean communities abroad, often engaging in cultural preservation while also integrating into broader societal frameworks.

The majority of the papers in this special issue have been presented at two conferences. Firstly, at the International Conference on Korean Studies in Ljubljana entitled *Korean and Asian Diaspora*, which was held on 14 April 2023. Secondly, at the International Conference on Korean Studies entitled *Korea Unbound—Diaspora Dynamics and Advancements in Korean Studies*, which was held on 16 February 2024¹ at the University of Ljubljana. The articles are arranged into three sections according to the research topic.

The initial section, entitled “Literature and Literary Criticism”, includes five articles that explore Korean identity through the medium of literature. The expression of Korean diaspora identity through literary works is a subject that with a rich and multifaceted nature. It is characterized by an in-depth exploration of themes such as displacement, cultural hybridity, and the quest for a sense of belonging. Writers from the Korean diaspora frequently draw upon their personal experiences of migration, the challenges of navigating multiple cultures, and the intricate processes involved in identity formation. The first section of the publication opens with an examination

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by Kang Byoung Yoong of the complex identity issues faced by the protagonist of Chang-Rae Lee's novel *Native Speaker*, who explores these through the lens of Hannah Arendt's concepts of the pariah and the parvenu. The paper then goes on to discuss the protagonist's internal conflict and external societal pressures, offering a comprehensive examination of the Korean American experience and thereby contributing to broader discussions on diaspora, identity, and cultural integration.

The second and third articles in this section explore the literary contributions of Kim Shijong (or Kim Si-jong) (1929–), a significant poet of the Zainichi Korean diaspora, focusing on themes of displacement, identity, and historical trauma. The first text, written by Yang Soonmo, emphasizes Kim's engagement with political and social movements, such as the Jeju April 3rd Incident, the anti-nuclear movement, and the Great East Japan Earthquake, situating his work within a broader global and diasporic literary context. It highlights how his poetry serves as a means of resistance and articulation of minority struggles. The second article, by Kwak Hyoungduck, while also discussing Kim's diasporic identity, takes a more philosophical and critical approach to his use of lyricism. It suggests that his poetry serves as a form of "revenge" on the Japanese language while simultaneously transforming Japanese literature. This perspective raises questions about how the diaspora experience is framed—whether as personal suffering, collective trauma, or artistic creation. Unlike the first paper, which presents Kim's poetry as a bridge across histories and movements, the second warns against reducing his work to mythologized lyrical expressions, emphasizing his deep engagement with the contradictions of diaspora itself. While both contributions recognize Kim's literary significance in the Zainichi Korean experience, the first focuses on his political activism and historical engagement, whereas the second critically examines the complexities of diaspora representation and the risks of romanticizing his work.

The article by Rajesh Kumar also explores the diasporic elements in the work of Yom Sang-seop (1897–1963). His post-liberation novels depict the experiences of Koreans who had migrated to Manchuria and other regions, only to return to a homeland transformed by partition and foreign influence. His works explore themes of displacement, nostalgia, and disillusionment, illustrating the "double diasporic" experience—where returnees find themselves estranged even in their homeland. By focusing on homecoming as both a personal and collective struggle, Yom's narratives challenge the idealized notion of return, revealing the complexities of national identity and the lingering effects of colonial rule.

The last article in this section is by Catalina Stanciu, who examines the representation of Zainichi Koreans and other marginalized identities in Min Jin Lee's novel *Pachinko* (2017), focusing on the intersection of diaspora and vulnerability. By

analysing how vulnerability manifests through transgenerational trauma, displacement, and marginalization, the study explores whether Lee's narrative offers spaces for resistance, empowerment, or solidarity beyond trauma. Drawing on theoretical frameworks of vulnerability and trauma, the paper highlights the dual nature of vulnerability—both as a source of precarity and as a foundation for resilience and communal care. Ultimately, it argues that *Pachinko* redefines vulnerability not merely as a state of weakness but as a catalyst for connection and transformation, bridging the divide between periphery and centre.

The second section, “Individual Narratives and Biographies”, includes three articles. It begins with one by Kim Bogook, whose study examines the life and ideological transformations of Choi Inhwon (1934–?), a North Korean student who studied in Hungary in the 1950s. Tracing his journey through Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Switzerland, the article highlights his involvement in the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, subsequent defection, and eventual return to North Korea in 1960. Choi's shifting political stance—from anti-socialist refugee to a willing repatriate—reflects the complex ideological realignments of North Korean students abroad during the Cold War. Through archival records, this research sheds light on the broader patterns of defection, political supervision, and the role of ideology in shaping North Korean diaspora experiences.

The following article in this section, by Sun Young Yun, examines the Korean diaspora in Austria, focusing on the Korean Literature-Friends-Club, a literary organization founded in 2012 by former Korean nurses who arrived in the 1960s and 1970s. Through their literary works and cultural activities, the club has played a significant role in preserving Korean identity and fostering transnational connections. The research highlights the evolving nature of the Korean community in Austria, which has grown to include various professional and cultural organizations. The findings contribute to the broader study of diaspora communities and transnational identity, demonstrating how literature serves as a medium for self-reflection and cultural continuity. The club's activities bridge the gap between past and present generations, ensuring the sustainability of Korean cultural expression in Austria.

The section concludes with an article by Chikako Shigemori Bučar, who focuses on Slovenian Catholic missionary activity in Korea during the early 20th century, focusing on a picture postcard of Tokwon Abbey. The article explores missionary journals and the role of Father Kanut d'Avernas (1884–1950), a Benedictine of Slovenian descent. The research highlights the Slovenian Missionary Society's printing efforts and the broader religious networks connecting Slovenia and Korea. By analysing archival materials, this study sheds light on the overlooked history of Slovenian missionaries in East Asia and their role in transnational religious identity formation.

The third section, “Diasporic Identity and Community Adaptation”, includes three articles, starting with a paper by Eva Vučkovič’s on the webtoon *Murrrz*, an autobiographical *dailylifetoon* by the Korean-American artist Mary Park. Through narrative analysis, it explores how the artist portrays herself and her immigrant parents, highlighting cultural contrasts and generational differences. Additionally, the study analyses reader interactions in the comments section, revealing how audiences relate to and challenge the author’s depiction of Korean identity. The findings illustrate the role of webtoons in shaping diasporic narratives and fostering cross-cultural dialogue, as readers from diverse backgrounds engage with and reinterpret the artist’s portrayal of Korean and universal experiences.

The article on the cultural adaptation of Korean expatriates residing in Hungary, a growing phenomenon driven by increased economic cooperation between the two countries, is written by Ramona Kovacs. Through in-depth interviews with Korean employees, entrepreneurs, students, and missionaries, the research explores the social transformations they undergo while integrating into Hungarian society. The study highlights the challenges of maintaining traditional customs while adapting to local norms and examines the formation of informal Korean communities. By analysing adaptation strategies and the factors influencing integration, this paper contributes to the broader discourse on diaspora studies and cross-cultural interactions.

Lee Yeong-Mi’s contribution focuses on American Protestant Missionaries in Korea between 1884 and 1942, when approximately 1,000 American Protestant missionaries immigrated to Korea. While driven by religious zeal, their long-term residence was sustained by financial stability provided by mission boards. Rather than living in hardship, they maintained a middle-class American lifestyle, forming self-contained communities with Western amenities and structured family lives. Although they faced challenges under Japanese rule, many remained for decades. This study reframes missionaries as immigrants who sought a better life—both spiritually and socioeconomically—revealing their migration as a blend of religious calling and material security.

This special issue of *Asian Studies* offers a comprehensive exploration of the evolving Korean diaspora, shedding light on its cultural, literary, and historical dimensions across generations and continents. Through diverse scholarly perspectives, these articles deepen our understanding of identity, adaptation, and transnational connections in an ever-globalizing world. Whether you are a researcher, student, or enthusiast of diaspora studies, this volume presents fresh insights into Korean communities worldwide. We thus invite you to engage with these thought-provoking discussions and wish you an enriching and inspiring reading experience!