

## **Editor's Introduction: Papers from the 2017 Asian Studies Graduate Student Conference in conjunction with the AAS-in-Asia Conference**

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The February 2018 special issue features articles based on presentations at the 2017 Asian Studies Graduate Student Conference in conjunction with the Association of Asian Studies-in-Asia Conference held at Korea University in Seoul. Inspired by similar conferences in the United States, the graduate students of the Korean History department have organized and sponsored a graduate student conference (the KUKH Graduate Student Conference) for the last four years. Our department is extremely supportive of graduate student work, the exchange of scholarly ideas (especially at the junior level), and up and coming scholarship. As a result of growing interest and support, 57 students from 13 different countries participated in the 2017 graduate student conference.

Since the AAS in Asia conference did not accept individual papers, there were many graduate students who wanted to participate but were unable to form a full panel. As a result, these students asked to participate in the KUKH Graduate Student Conference, or join the panels of our Korean History department graduate students. Instead of operating in competition, we believed it would be more constructive to hold an Asian Studies Graduate Student Conference in conjunction with the AAS in Asia con-

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ference. Rather than focus on Korean history, we accommodated a broader scope to include Asian Studies in general, and asked students to present on topics related to the AAS in Asia "Beyond Borders and Boundaries" theme. After reviewing the 94 applications, the graduate student organizers grouped together relevant papers to make panels. As a result, 18 students participated in the East Asian History session, 19 students participated in the Korean Literature, Language and Culture session, and 20 students presented in the Chinese and Japanese Studies session.

In general, the Department of Korean History is committed to supporting graduate students around the globe, and believe that this complemented the theme of the AAS in Asia Conference by reaching beyond the boundaries of established academics to include as yet unknown but promising future scholars. Previously, the AAS in Asia conferences had not provided this kind of opportunity to graduate students, but we hope the AAS board and program committee shares our vision of investing in the future and establishing a new precedent that emphasizes the importance of the role of the next generation of scholars.

To demonstrate our support of junior scholars, we chose to feature three papers from the graduate student conference. The first article by Meng Heng Lee, a Ph.D. student from the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures at Columbia University, challenges the standard definition of *ukanju* as Manchu slaves or escapees. Using Manchu, Chosŏn, and Qing archives, Lee not only overturns the conventional interpretation of the *ukanju*, but also demonstrates the social diversity of this group and the significance of their role in the Ming-Qing transition. "*Ukanju* and the Changing Political Order of Northeastern Asia in the 17th Century" is an excellent example of how younger scholars are using transnational histories to improve our historical understanding.

The second paper is written by Euy Suk Simon Kwon, a Ph.D. Candidate in the School of East Asian Studies at the University of Sheffield. His article, "An Unfulfilled Expectations: Britain's Response to the Question of Korean Independence, 1903-5," examines a relatively unexplored topic, the escalating tension between Russia and Japan, and Britain's po-

sition regarding the question of Korean independence. Not only is this time period relatively under-researched in Korean history, but Kwon approaches the topic from a broad perspective which helps us understand the complicated nature of Korean foreign relations at the turn of the century.

The final paper by Juhee Kang, Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University, inspects the fractures in the government and various scientific organizations in Taisho Japan, and challenges the assumed stability of the government. “‘A Thorough Study of the Spanish Influenza’: How Japanese Party Politics and the Ministerial Conflicts Reduced the Pandemic” uses the government’s response to the Spanish Influenza epidemic to demonstrate how despite Japan’s establishment of an extensive empire and modern state, even in the 1920s the state was actually an unstable combination of “fragmentary party interests and incoherent ministerial authorities.” Her article is another fine example of the next generation of scholars challenging assumptions and adding to our historical understanding.

Apart from the three articles published in this issue, there were other outstanding presentations and innovative approaches covering a wide range of topics and fields. Witnessing firsthand the very exciting research these young scholars are working on gave me and my colleagues great confidence in the future of Asian Studies, and impressed upon us even more the need to reach beyond the traditional academic borders and boundaries. Although this journal is dedicated to Korean historical scholarship, we are in the midst of redefining what Korean history is and re-shaping its future with the help of the next generation of scholars.

