

Editorial

Docendo discimus

Dear Readers—*teachers and students*,

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the Irish Journal of Asian Studies (IJAS).

IJAS is affiliated with the School of Asian Studies at University College Cork - National University of Ireland (UCC), and the recently formed Irish Association for Asian Studies (IAAS). It is an international peer-reviewed online journal, which provides a significant multi-disciplinary space for the publication of original, scholarly articles encompassing all aspects of research relating to Asia in the broadest sense, from pre-modern times until the present day. The journal is especially interested in articles by scholars who research in Asian languages, using original material, while engaging with critical theory and innovative methodological approaches. It will also publish reviews on recently authored material of important works.

The journal will highlight the immense diversity that exists in Asia by having ‘themed’ issues relating to one region or topic, as well as open, more general issues drawing on the rich research of scholars working in fields such as anthropology, linguistics, politics, religion, philosophy, history and culture.

This first issue is a themed one: Korea – Past, Present and Future. Korean Studies as an academic discipline has grown exponentially around the globe in the last two decades. Undoubtedly some of this growth is related to the explosion of Korean popular culture globally, from K-dramas to K-pop. However, as this first volume shows, most scholars and researchers are drawn to Korea due to its remarkable intellectual, cultural and religious diversity.

The first article is by James Huntley Grayson, one of the most renowned Koreanists in the world today. His book, *Korea - A Religious History*, which has also been translated into Korean, is regarded as the go-to book for anyone who wishes to understand Korea’s religious history. Grayson’s article highlights the undulating trajectory of various religious traditions on the Korean peninsula from pre-modern to the present, and is a reflective piece on almost fifty years of engagement with Korea. It provides a clear overview to the reader of the rich diversity that has helped shaped Korea into the cultural and religious melting pot that it is today.

While Grayson’s article reviews several different traditions, the second article by Patrick Kilkelly focuses on the earliest Catholic catechism in the Korean language, *Chugyo Yoji* (Essentials of the Lord’s Teachings), written by the scholar Chŏng Yakchong (1760-

1801). Kilkelly highlights its innovative features, written in the vernacular script, *han'gŭl*, and read widely by members of the lower classes, especially women. He also provides a close reading of the text, emphasizing Chŏng's ability to blend this new religious doctrine with ideas and concepts from his own socio-cultural Confucian background.

John Lee's article problematises the role and function of Buddhism in South Korea today, which he suggests is geared towards self-preservation by promoting itself as the true transmitter of 'Korean' spirituality. Lee examines the influence of nationalism and Korea's 'Uri' (Us/Our) collective-consciousness, while engaging with issues such as multiculturalism and the development of the recent Temple Stay Programme (TSP). In addition, he comments on some recent developments by lay Buddhists and those not affiliated with the mainstream monastic orders.

Ruth Mueller's article provides an insightful look at the transformation over time of traditional musical genres, focusing on the role of women (such as *Kisaeng* and Shaman) who have often been side-lined in studies, or not taken as seriously as men. Mueller draws attention to the importance of women as preservers of tradition, and describes how today, rather ironically, they have come to pre-dominate in fields from which they traditionally had been excluded. It is a much needed look at the inter-relationship between women, music and Korea's traditional heritage.

The final article by Hwang Yuh-Jhung, a Korean scholar living in Ireland, explores the staging of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* by the Sanwoollim Theatre from Seoul, during the 1960s and 2000s. Hwang focuses on the relationship between the director, Lim Young-Woong, and Beckett's play, but she also explores the link between Korea and Ireland, highlighting the nostalgia for Dublin as an imaginary hometown. It is a fascinating and fitting final article for this inaugural issue.

The book reviews also deal with two important, though very different areas within Korean Studies: Jana Hajzlerová has reviewed Andrei Lankov's latest book on North Korea, while David W. Kim has reviewed a recent work on *K-POP – The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry*.

I am very pleased that this first edition has provided us with such a stimulating array of articles and reviews from such high calibre scholars from Australia, Britain, the Czech Republic, Ireland, Korea and the United States. Such international contributions clearly highlight the need for an online journal such as *1JAS* and I look forward to receiving more research articles and reviews for the next issue.

I sincerely hope that *1JAS* becomes a global forum for excellent scholarship, and that it will also promote Asian Studies and its further development in Ireland.

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