

# CKR NEWSLETTER

The Center for Korean Research at the Weatherhead East Asian Institute

Columbia University

2012-2013



*Cover image: Gilbert Choi, 360-Degree View of Seoul from the N Seoul Tower*



THE CENTER FOR  
**KOREAN**  
RESEARCH

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# DIRECTOR'S NOTE

BY CHARLES ARMSTRONG



According to the East Asian lunar calendar we are now in the Year of the Snake, which began on February 10, 2013. Traditionally, the snake is characterized as mysterious and introverted, but CKR has been quite the opposite! The 2012-2013 academic year has been an especially busy one for the Center, which hosted numerous guest lectures, forums, seminars, and a translation contest among other activities. The focus of CKR's work this year has been on the culture and politics of modern and contemporary Korea, and our events have been more or less evenly divided between the humanities and current affairs. Shortly after the academic year began in September, Professor John Lie gave a provocative talk entitled "What is the 'K' in K-Pop?" (hint: NOT "Korea!") to a standing-room-only audience in the

Weatherhead East Asian Institute conference room. In October, CKR co-sponsored two events related to North Korea, both of them "firsts": a report on a School of International and Public Affairs student trip to North Korea, the first visit ever by an American university student group; and a talk by Columbia alumna Jean Lee, the first Associated Press reporter stationed in Pyongyang. In December, CKR hosted an award ceremony for student essays on the Korean novel *The Bird* (featured later in this newsletter). The Center also hosted two ongoing series, the Colloquium on Korean Cultural Studies, featuring talks by Ellie Choi of Cornell, Jina Kim of Smith College, and Jesook Song of the University of Toronto; and the CKR-Korea Economic Institute Policy Forum, featuring a roundtable on Korea-Japan-US regional cooperation in October and a discussion of the 2012 South Korean presidential election at the end of January.

In addition, CKR is hosting two symposia in the spring. The first, Common Ground, was sponsored by the contemporary art project Unify Korea and held on March 2 in Columbia's Altschul Auditorium. The second, to be held on May 3, is this year's CKR Regional Seminar and will bring together a group of scholars to discuss the sixtieth anniversary of the Korean War Armistice.

Once again, we would like to thank the staff at Weatherhead for their continued work with the CKR, as well as our co-sponsors on these various events. Our program coordinator, Jooyeon Kim; student assistant, Sahng-Ah Yoo; and numerous student volunteers have done stellar work in managing the day-to-day activities of the Center. Last but certainly not least, we would like to express our deepest appreciation to the Korea Foundation, the M.S. Shin Fund, and the Columbia University Alumni Association of Korea for their financial support.



The snake is a symbol of change and rebirth, and this aspect of the Year of the Snake does hold true for CKR. This will be my last Director's note before handing the reins over to my colleague Theodore Hughes, the Korea Foundation Associate Professor of Korean Studies in the Humanities. It has been an honor and a privilege directing the CKR over these last seven years. During my time at the Center, interest in Korean Studies has grown throughout the university, and CKR has deepened its ties with student groups and other research centers at Columbia, as

well as off-campus institutions in New York and Korea, such as the Korean Cultural Service, the Korea Society, the Korean Literature Translation Institute, and many others. Columbia's Korean Studies faculty has undergone momentous changes, including the retirement of longtime Associate Director Samuel Kim; the passing of Professor JaHyun Kim Haboush, King Sejong Professor of Korean Studies; and the hiring of Professor Jungwon Kim in pre-modern Korean history, who will join the Columbia faculty in fall 2013. Thanks to the hard work and enthusiasm of all the people associated with the Center, the CKR has truly established its presence as the focal point of Korean Studies at Columbia University and the greater New York region. I look forward to the continued growth and visibility of the Center under Ted Hughes' capable direction.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "C. Armstrong", written in a cursive style.

# PEOPLE TO KNOW

**Jungwon Kim**, Assistant Professor of East Asian Languages and Cultures



Jungwon Kim will be joining Columbia's EALAC department in Fall 2013 after having taught at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Now focusing on writing her book that explores the cult of chastity and its impact on the lives of Korean women in the 18th and 19th centuries, this scholar of Chosŏn Korea has keen interest in ordinary people's lives.

*Interviewed by **Ksenia Chisova**, Ph.D. candidate*

**KS:** *What do you anticipate will be major changes in the professional and academic environment as you transition into Columbia's EALAC department?*

**JK:** I think the major change in academic environment will be the opportunity to really focus on teaching premodern Korean history at Columbia. At U of Illinois, where I was the only Korean history faculty member on campus (as is the norm at most US universities), my courses covered not only the history of premodern and modern Korea, but East Asian civilizations and histories as well [...] As a historian of Chosŏn Korea, I have always hoped to offer in-depth upper-level colloquiums or grad seminar courses on Korean history prior to the twentieth century. I am truly excited that Columbia is one of the few US institutions offering such courses in premodern Korea and that it has already trained first-rate historians of Korea. Other important changes will be having the rich East Asian library nearby with librarians in Korean studies—something that I have missed so much at U of Illinois—as well as the Center for Korea Research, which fully supports and promotes activities related to Korean studies.

**KS:** *You are currently working on your book. Could you briefly describe it?*

**JK:** My book manuscript, *Negotiating Virtue: The Politics of Chastity and Social Power in Late Chosŏn Korea*, was born out of my curiosity about how people actually lived in Chosŏn society. *Negotiating Virtue* explores the lives of 18th and 19th century Korean women at all levels of social status by delving into the ideology, practice, and socio-legal impact of chastity culture, as revealed through a large body of underused legal testimonies that allow us to observe the lower strata of society. Through an analysis of the perception and practice of chastity among ordinary people, this manuscript not only reconsiders the conventional wisdom that “all women” in the late Chosŏn were subject to, and internalized, the dominant Confucian notions of female virtue, but reevaluates the prevailing historical narrative in which chastity culture is employed as powerful evidence of Confucianization in Chosŏn society, a claim that has enormous historiographical implications for the study of new (wo)men and family both in early 20th century Korea under Japanese colonialism and in modern Korea.

**KS:** *As a Ph.D. student in dissertation-writing phase and having the prospect of job-hunting and teaching in the near future, I am curious to ask what are the major challenges at the beginning of the teaching career. What, would you say, were the things that you were not quite prepared for?*

**JK:** I still remember how nervous I was right before the start of my very first semester at U of Illinois. Most grad students these days get solid training in teaching courses, and I believe such experience is definitely helpful preparation for a teaching career. It can actually be difficult to acknowledge the fact that now, at long last, you have to stand on your own. But at the same time, you will have wonderful colleagues who are willing to guide your smooth transition from a grad student to a professional teacher.

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**Sue Mi Terry**, Senior Research Scholar



Sue Mi Terry is a Senior Research Scholar with a focus on North Korea, particularly North Korean leadership succession plans, Pyongyang's evolving nuclear strategy and the potential for instability in North Korea, politics and foreign policy of South Korea, Northeast Asian security, and US-Northeast Asia relations.

*Interviewed by **Tae Young Kim**, SIPA student*

**TK:** *How did you end up coming to SIPA and what are your impressions so far about SIPA students?*

**ST:** After more than a decade of public service, I was looking to do something that was meaningful and I found teaching to be one of the more meaningful things I could do. I chose SIPA because of its stellar reputation, diverse student body, and of course its location (New York!). Currently I teach International Relations of East Asia with a classroom full of students from China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, the US, and other parts of Asia. I am having a blast learning from these students.

(continued on page 10)

# This Year in Review

During the year of the dragon and into the year of the snake, CKR is proud to have played host to so many politicians have made in their efforts in researching and expressing the Korean culture, literature, etc.

September 20, 2012

## What is the K in K-pop?

*Colloquium Series on Korean Cultural Studies*

Speaker: John Lie, University of California, Berkeley

"South Korea has become a culture that worships mammon," at least according to John Lie. In a heavily engaging, anecdote-laden hour, Lie traced out what he thinks is South Korea's cultural trajectory. It ends at modern Korea, a country governed by "state bureaucrats [...] who feel that they need to brand Korea," and who thus support K-pop, a genre that Lie contends is utterly artificial and expressly made for export. Lie fretted over a "fundamental divide between 'traditional Korean identity' and the 'export orientation [that] is the master cultural reflex of South Korea.'"

*Written by Conor Skelding, Bwog*

October 18, 2012

## Space and Alterity in Colonial Korea: The Case of Yi Kwangsu

*Colloquium Series on Korean Cultural Studies*

Speaker: Ellie Choi, Cornell University

A scholar of Korean literature and intellectual history at Cornell University, Professor Choi contextualized the topic of the talk in her larger project that examines the linkages between space, cultural nationalism, and colonial identity. In this engaging and illuminating lecture, Professor Choi focused on the cityscapes described in Yi Kwangsu's writings, including his seminal 1917 novel *The Heartless* (*Mujŏng*). Professor Choi argued that while many have emphasized Yi as an advocate of modernization, Yi's approach toward modernity entailed much more than a simple rejection of the past, as shown through his efforts to reinvent the Korean literary tradition, for example. The close ties between modernization and colonization, as well as the conception that for the colony, modern life would be mere imitation of not only Japan but of the West, posed further problems for Korean nationalists. As a result, Yi sought to define the nation in terms of authenticity and identity that were grounded beyond the "surfaces" of capitalist modernity, even as he championed the progressive development of the Korean nation. Using Benedict Anderson's notion of "doubling" to analyze the cityscapes in Yi's novel, Professor Choi demonstrated how the experience of the city entailed continually thinking about another site as a point of reference and comparison. Most interestingly, Professor Choi pointed to the occurrences of such a doubling not only between Kyŏngsŏng and Tokyo but also between Kyŏngsŏng and Pyŏng-yang, with the latter space characterized through traces of local legends and traditions, and experienced in contrast to the colonial capital.

*Written by Mi-Ryong Shim*

October 2, 2012

## A First Glimpse of North Korea

Speaker: Professor Elisabeth Lindenmayer, Director of the United Nations Studies Program

Led by Professor Elisabeth Lindenmayer, Director of the United Nations Studies Program, fifteen students returned from their May 2012 visit to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to discuss their impressions and experiences from their trip.

October 17, 2012

## Korea-Japan-US Trilateral Cooperation in an Uncertain Northeast Asia

*CKR-KEI Policy Forum*

For the full story, turn to page 5

October 19, 2012

## A New North Korea?

Speaker: Jean H. Lee, Bureau Chief of the Associated Press

This lecture featured Jean H. Lee, Bureau Chief of the Associated Press (AP), who spoke to a packed crowd at Columbia University about her experiences in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea). Ms. Lee, an alumna of Columbia College and Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism, took the audience through a slide-show narrative of changes taking place within North Korea.



Throughout her presentation, Ms. Lee showed the audience conflicting pictures of North Korea – some that showed progress and others that showed closed, unchanged and poverty-ridden lifestyles. Speaking on behalf of journalists, Lee ended the one-hour talk justifying the importance of the presence of foreign correspondents in North Korea. She said her mission was "to try and flush out the narrative from the ground." She stated that she has no political agenda, and her motive is to understand what the Korean people want and what motivates them.

Whether the change in leadership will in fact lead to a *new* North Korea, still remains to be seen. Ms. Lee reiterated that it was too early for the world to tell and that North Korea is still in a transition period, but that, "The mood on the street has definitely changed. There is more curiosity and more cheerfulness."

# iew

many outstanding speakers and to have shared the progress that various academics, artists, and economy, and politics. **Take a look!**

January 31, 2013

## South Korea's New President: Historic Election, Historic Challenges

*CKR-KEI Policy Forum*

For the full story, turn to page 5

March 2, 2013

## Common Ground

Speakers: Charles Armstrong, Bruce Cumings, Doug Hostetter, BG Muhn, Morten Traavik, Jane Farver, Yu Yeon Kim, Gordon Knox, John L. Moore, and Heng Gil Han

The symposium Common Ground brought together scholars, artists, and curators to discuss the role of culture and art exchange in facilitating co-operation and mutual understanding between North Korea and other countries, especially the United States. Sponsored by the Korea Art Forum, a newly-established nonprofit organization based in New York, Common Ground is the inaugural event of the Korea Art Forum's "Unify Korea" project.

April 18, 2013

## Filiality and Care: Tracing Indebtedness of Young Women's Labor Subjectivity in South Korea

*Colloquium Series on Korean Cultural Studies*

Professor Jesook Song, University of Toronto

May 3, 2013

## A Limited Peace

The 2013 CKR Regional Seminar on May 3rd is entitled "A Limited Peace: The Korean War Armistice after Sixty Years" and will discuss the reasons for and significance of "armed peace" on the Korean peninsula since the armistice of 1953, which ended the fighting but not the war itself. The seminar will feature talks by Bruce Cumings of the University of Chicago, Marilyn Young of NYU, Suk-Young Kim of the University of California-Santa Barbara, Susie Kim of the University of Virginia, and others.

December 13, 2012

## 2012 Korean Literature Essay Contest Award - Award Ceremony and Reception

For the full story, turn to page 7

February 21, 2013

## Intermedial Aesthetics: Photography, Sound, and Text in Early 20th Century Korean Cinematic Novel

*Colloquium Series on Korean Cultural Studies*

Speaker: Jina Kim, Smith College

On February 21, the CKR hosted "Intermedial Aesthetics: Photography, Sound, and Text in Early 20th Century Korean Cinematic Novel," a lecture featuring Jina Kim, Assistant Professor of East Asian Studies at Smith College.



In her presentation, Professor Kim argued how mass media such as photography, film, and radio affected the field of literature during the colonial period. She briefly examined the transformation of Korean cultural landscape in the 1920s and 1930s under Japan's liberal colonial policy, which provided Korean artists a space for expression. During this time, new photographic and cinematic techniques were introduced in Korea and created a new genre of aesthetics, "cinematic novel."

Professor Kim gave an analysis of the narrative style of Sim Hun's *Mask Dance*, which was published on *Tonga Ilbo* in 1926. Best known for his novel *Sangnoksu* (Evergreen), Sim Hun combined the latest photographic techniques with traditional texts in narrating *Mask Dance*. One of the photographs featured Na Woon-gyu, the most popular Korean actor at the time, highlighting the popularity of the new genre.

*Written by Se Young Chung*

# CKR-KEI PO

## THE START

DR. ABRAHAM KIM, COLUMBIA PH.D. IN POLITICAL SCIENCE AND VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE WASHINGTON-SERIES OF CO-SPONSORED EVENTS ON THE COLUMBIA CAMPUS ON POLICY-RELATED ISSUES REGARDING KOREA IN THE UNITED STATES, THIS WOULD BE THE FIRST TIME THE ORGANIZATION SPONSORED REGULAR EVENTS AT THE CAMPUS TO BRING LEADING SCHOLARS AND POLICY MAKERS FROM WASHINGTON, NEW YORK, AND ELSEWHERE TO DISCUSS KOREAN FIRST POLICY FORUM WAS HELD IN OCTOBER 2012, AND THE SECOND IN JANUARY 2013. BOTH WERE EXTRAORDINARY KOREAN AFFAIRS. OUR PLAN IS TO HOST A POLICY FORUM AT LEAST ONCE PER SEMESTER.

## THE EVENTS



October 17, 2012

“Korea-Japan-US Trilateral Cooperation in an Uncertain Northeast Asia”

*Panel Speakers:* **Jung Ro Kim** (Ministry of Unification), Professor **Jeong-Ho Roh** (Columbia Law School), Professor **Junya Nishino** (Keio University), and **Patrick Cronin** (Center for New American Security)

*Respondents:* Professor **Gerald Curtis** (Columbia University) and Professor **Jin Shin** (Chungnam National University)

A diverse panel of speakers analyzed the challenges and opportunities for South Korea-Japan-US trilateral cooperation. served as the discussants. Mr. Cronin discussed trilateral cooperation to address North Korea’s nuclear threat and China’s economic rise. He labeled North Korea a “nuclear-armed powder keg” and emphasized that all three nations must act jointly in the event of a North Korean missile launch. Professor Nishino presented survey results indicating that 62.2% of Japanese respondents “felt close” to South Korea and only 15% of Japanese respondents felt strongly about historical conflicts with South Korea, compared to 43% for South Korean respondents vis-à-vis the Japanese. Professor Roh expressed skepticism that tensions associated with historical conflicts such as “comfort women” and the Tok-Do Islands territorial dispute would be resolved by a trilateral agreement. Mr. Kim emphasized that South Korea’s balanced relationships with China and the United States contrast with Japanese politicians’ varying stances on China. In addition, trilateral cooperation is subject to leadership changes in each nation. Professor Curtis asserted that bilateral cooperation between Japan and South Korea will serve as the basis for trilateral cooperation on issues such as North Korea. He also pointed out that, despite the tensions between them, the two nations share significant business and educational ties which moderate their animosity. Professor Shin stated that the 1965 Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and South Korea legally settled the historical conflicts between the two nations, but both societies still seek emotional penance and this gives politicians the opportunity to exploit these conflicts. After the opening remarks, the speakers answered questions regarding military cooperation, the sunshine policy, and historical conflicts, among others.

*Written by Prashant Reddy*

# POLICY FORUM

THE CENTER FOR KOREAN RESEARCH, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, APPROACHED ME IN 2011 ABOUT HAVING A REGULAR POLICY FORUM. ALTHOUGH KEI OFTEN SPONSORS CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS ON CAMPUSES ACROSS THE COUNTRY, WE MET AT THE SAME VENUE OUTSIDE OF WASHINGTON, DC. THE FIRST CKR-KEI POLICY FORUM IS INTENDED TO DISCUSS ISSUES OF CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE TO KOREAN AFFAIRS AND US-KOREAN RELATIONS. THE FORUM WAS EXTREMELY WELL-ATTENDED, REFLECTING THE STRONG INTEREST AT COLUMBIA AND NEW YORK IN CONTEMPORARY KOREAN AFFAIRS.



January 31, 2013

“South Korea’s New President: Historic Election, Historic Challenges”

*Panel Speakers:* Professor **Seungsook Moon** (Vassar College), Professor **Katherine Moon** (Wellesley College), and **Nicholas Hamisevicz** (Korea Economic Institute)

*Moderator:* Professor **Charles Armstrong** (Center for Korean Research, Columbia University)

On January 31, 2013, the Center for Korean Research welcomed Professor Seungsook Moon (Vassar College), Professor Katherine Moon (Wellesley College), and Nicholas Hamisevicz (Korea Economic Institute) for a panel discussion on the recent South Korean presidential election. With CKR’s Director Charles Armstrong moderating the discussion, each member of the panel brought a different perspective on the historic significance of Park Geun Hye’s victory and its possible influence in the future. Professor Seungsook Moon discussed the statistics of the election, emphasizing the high voting turnout rate, especially among the elderly. Questions were raised about the significance of Ahn Cheol Soo’s withdrawal from the presidential race on the voters, and Moon argued that his initial involvement in the race had little impact on the results. Professor Katherine Moon compared the leaders of the four East Asian countries (China, Japan, North Korea, and South Korea), who were all elected or appointed within the past year, and noted the interesting fact that each of them had a father who lead the country in previous years. She also briefly discussed the current South Korean-United States relationship and interaction, in light of North Korea’s most recent nuclear threat, clearly hoping that the United States does not leave South Korea out of the picture in its discussions with China and North Korea as it has in the past. Nicholas Hamisevicz wrapped up the conversation by looking at what President Park has done in her first month of the term, highlighting her communication with China and Japan. In general, the panel left the audience with much to think about as we watch the Park administration in the coming years.

*Written by Sabng-Ah Yoo*

# 2012 Essay Con

## *Meet the Translator: Jenny Wang Medina*

### [Speech transcript]

Hello everyone, my name is Jenny Wang Medina. I'm a Ph.D. Candidate in modern Korean literature here at Columbia, one of the judges of this contest, and the translator of *The Bird*, the subject of these essays.

First, I'd like to thank the KLTJ and the Center for Korean Research for sponsoring this contest, Professor Hughes and Professor Armstrong for supporting the event, and Jooyeon Kim for all her hard work in putting this together. Finally, I'd like to thank all the contestants for reading *The Bird* and sharing your ideas about this work with us.

Reading these essays really took me back to my experience translating *The Bird*. If you've read it, you know that it is not any easy text, either in its dense prose, or its heavy subject matter, which deals with childhood abandonment, family loss, and emotional and physical violence. These issues are tempered—or exacerbated, depending on your point of view—by the use of a child's voice as the narrator. One of the biggest challenges I had while translating the text was to try to remain true to the voice of the child narrator while dealing these weighty issues. This is something that O Chong-hui, the author of *The Bird*, does masterfully in this, and in many of her other works.

Several of the essays we read reflected on the use of the child narrator as a narrative technique for critiquing the breakdown of family and social structures in the novella, but each writer was able to approach this question from her or his individual perspective. I was very pleased overall by the quality of writing in all the essays, and appreciated the opportunity to read about the personal experiences included in each writer's analysis of the work.

Sora Yang, the winner of the first place prize in the Undergraduate division, impressed the judges with her analysis of the childhood narrative and her careful attention to the prose style of the text. She was able to connect the narrative perspective very successfully to the themes addressed in the novel, while suggesting, quite rightly, that this is a work that transcends generic conventions. Patrick, our second place winner, took a very different approach in his excellent analytical reading of the categories of gender and their relationship to societal violence in the text. I must say, while we were impressed by the quality of all the entries, we did have a very tough choice between the first and second place essays. Hari Prasad, our third place essay, focused on the animal imagery in *The Bird*, and his thorough dissection of the symbolism of animals in the story was very compelling as well.

As the translator of this of this work, it was very gratifying to see new readers engaging with this story at so many levels, and I thought everyone did an excellent job of trying to penetrate the inner workings of the text. The responses also reminded me of why I chose to translate O Chong-ui in the first place. I am not the first, the last, or even the most prolific translator of O Chong-hui's work. But the continued interest in her writing from the 1970s to today is a real testament to her beautiful prose and her ability to write affecting stories that appeal to a universal audience, while speaking so eloquently about the particulars of contemporary Korean society.

I'm very grateful to have had the opportunity to revisit this text through the essays submitted to this competition, and I hope you all continue to keep reading and contributing to the discussion of Korean literature.



Listed from left to right: Professor Charles Armstrong, Jenny Wang, Patrick Woods, Linnea Emison, Michael Kim, Sora Yang, Jae Won Chung, Professor Theodore Hughes, and Jooyeon Kim



## *Meet the Winners*

### High School



**LINNEA EMISON, 1st place**

*"What I found most exciting about the [award ceremony] was that everybody who attended was there because they cared about this book... As a homeschooler, I rarely have the opportunity to be a part of a group of people who have come together because they have all thought deeply about the same book and want to share their thoughts."*



**GA EUN CHO, 2nd place**

*"The Korean Literature Essay Contest was a wonderful chance to get to know a wonderful book and explore a shade of Korean society that I had previously overlooked. I decided to write my essay about Christianity and superstition in The Bird because all of us, especially those of us in great despair, look for coping resources to help us through the day."*



**MICHAEL KIM, 3rd place**

*"The Bird was a book that I couldn't put down, awfully inspiring me at the turn of each page and making me reflect upon my own life, struggles and happiness. After finishing the last page, so many different ideas were flowing through my brain."*

### Undergraduate

**SORA YANG, 1st place**

*"The Bird was not a story I could approach easily, nor write blithely about, and it was this struggle to understand these characters that spurred me on in my attempt to articulate my thoughts... I was, and still am, grateful for the opportunity to have been able to write, and share my own understanding of The Bird."*



**PATRICK WOODS, 2nd place**

*"The awards ceremony was an excellent chance to meet the professors and students who are involved with the Center for Korean Research and to hear firsthand from the judges what they thought about the winning essays... as an East Asian Languages and Cultures major, I was happy to be able to take part."*



**HARI PRASAD, 3rd Place**

*"As a student in the general humanities and sciences it is very hard to find academic competitions to enter, especially being in an Australian University. I would like to thank the Korean Research Centre for giving this opportunity. While there are many academic centres spanning the globe, very few give opportunities like this; especially to undergraduates."*

(continued from page 3)

**TK:** What is your current academic focus?

**ST:** At the moment I am focused on the North Korean nuclear issue, as well as the general history and politics of East Asia and US policy towards the region.

**TK:** How did you become a North Korea expert in the beginning?

**ST:** After receiving my doctorate degree from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts, I initially wanted to enter academia right away. Instead, I joined the Central Intelligence Agency as a North Korea analyst, an experience which I learned to value tremendously.

**TK:** How difficult is North Korea to analyze?

**ST:** After having focused on the North Korean issue for the US government, both in the intelligence and policy communities, think tank, and now in academia, I can say that North Korea is truly one of the most difficult situations to find a good solution for the US government and the East Asian region. Winston Churchill once described Russia as "a riddle, wrapped in mystery, inside an enigma." This accurately describes the situation in North Korea. The intelligence community considers North Korea to be one of the "hard targets" and for a good reason.

**TK:** Can you share any advice with SIPA students who intend to have a career in international relations?

**ST:** I want to encourage the students to consider public service at least for a period of time. It is a tremendously rewarding experience. Be open minded and consider all options. You might find satisfying career fulfillment in places you might not have thought of. When I was a graduate student, I was initially singularly focused in getting into academia right away but in hindsight, I am glad I spent years working for the US government instead. Also, try to find and cultivate good mentors. They can be a source of inspiration as well as knowledge.

**TK:** What are your short-term plans and goals here in Columbia University?

**ST:** To continue my research on North Korea and contribute as much as I can through teaching. I enjoy exchanging ideas with the students as well as giving "real world" advice to the students.

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## Sonya Chung, Lecturer on Creative Writing



Sonya Chung is the author of the novel *Long for This World* (2010), which was selected for *Magill's Literary Annual 2011*. She is a recipient of a Pushcart Prize nomination, the Charles Johnson Fiction Award, the Bronx Council on the Arts Writers' Fellowship & Residency, and a MacDowell Colony Fellowship.

Interviewed by **Jenny Wang**, Ph.D. candidate

**JW:** You've said that your novel, *Long for this World*, was inspired by your first visit to Korea, made when you were in your late twenties. Tell us a bit about your experience.

**SC:** My first trip was really an ideal mix of independent discovery and family connections. I had the good fortune of traveling mostly with my mother, who is both bilingual and bicultural. Part of my time there was tourist-oriented and part of it centered around visiting family I'd never met before, most of whom live in small towns and villages. I was very glad, in retrospect, to have waited (unlike many other Korean-Americans) until I was an adult to visit for the first time: I was "ready" to engage with my parents' home culture (my transitive home culture); to immerse myself in, and process the strangeness of, feeling simultaneously at home and completely foreign all at once. There is really nothing like it—that emotional-intellectual weirdness of knowing you "should" feel comfortable and yet feeling extremely out of place. If you stay long enough, if you have a good bridge person (as my mother was), then that out-of-place feeling does, at moments, break open into an at-homeness that is also like nothing I'd ever felt before.

**JW:** You mentioned feeling like a foreigner in Korea; as a minority writer, do you think that the "foreign" or "foreign literature" means something very different in the US context?

**SC:** "Foreignness" in the US obviously varies according to region. I think that I feel more at home in New York City than in any other American city or region, because the word "foreigner" rarely applies: so much of the population originates from elsewhere, speaks non-English first languages, etc. While certainly there is social and economic marginalization in New York, it is almost impossible to be conspicuous.

**JW:** In American publishing (and culture generally), there is certainly an emphasis on youth and prodigiousness, which seems to almost contradict the equally potent desire for fiction to express something profound about human life. How do you approach this contradictory impulse for the old and new, or youth and wisdom, in your novel, which spans several generations and cultural perspectives? And did you see this as a big cultural difference between the American and Korean families in your novel?

**SC:** What a terrific question; and one I've never been asked. It's interesting for me to think of the Han family [in *Long for This World*] in terms of young and old, youth and wisdom; and to recognize that, in my fiction in general, I am always interested in the distinction between the world views of older characters and younger characters. I suppose that if there is something in my psyche that is very "Asian," it would be this reverence for age and wisdom. I have always been someone who automatically affords respect to an older person, and who in fact seeks out older friends and mentors; I trust experience—the wisdom of a life deeply lived—more than anything.

But I am also, at my core, a romantic; which is a disposition more associated with youth. And so, in *Long for This World*, my favorite character (I love them all, but if I had to choose), is Chae Min-suk, who is in his late 40s, has lived and learned a lot about life, and art, and faith, and love; but is also “boyish.” He is that intriguing combination of jaded and romantic; and also the character in the novel who embodies both Eastern and Western most fully. One of the reasons I enjoy writing novels is that, in the world of the novel, I feel that I, the author, can embrace a “both/and” vision of life, through the characters. In life, I find it frustrating and difficult that, in so many contexts, we are forced/confined to choosing “either/or.” Consider President Obama: he is often accused of being either “too black” or “too white” (not to mention too moderate or too liberal). The American media seems unable to settle down with and celebrate the truth, the reality, which is that racially, politically, dispositionally, intellectually, spiritually, he is many things; not one or another.

**JW:** Lastly, what do you think of Psy?

SC: Ha! Well, I was late to discovering him, since I’m not the most plugged-in person when it comes to pop culture. The snooty-effete part of me gets a little annoyed when I see popular musicians who are not really musicians—they don’t seem to actually be able to make music the way, say, a Michael Jackson was a consummate musician in addition to all his performative talents. But in terms of the power of pop culture to create a sense of community—across all ages, cultures, geographical boundaries—I love the way dance can do this like nothing else. So I think “Gangnam Style” is a pretty fun phenomenon that seems to get everyone moving their bodies around expressively, communally; what’s not to love about that?

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## Laurel Kendall, Adjunct Professor of Anthropology



Laurel Kendall the Curator of Asian Ethnographic Collections and Chair of the Anthropology Division at American Museum of National History. Her work critically examines Korea’s rapid changes via lively and rigorous studies of popular religion, shamans, weddings, the nature of risk, and sacred objects and markets.

Interviewed by **Michelle Hwang**, Ph.D. candidate

**MH:** How did you get your start as an anthropologist and how did you begin to work in Korea?

**LK:** US Peace Corps sent me. Initially it wasn’t easy to make friends and the language was difficult. When I began to make progress on both fronts, it was impossible to step away.

I already knew I wanted to be an anthropologist. Anthropologists were described as people who studied the sum of human activity. This meant not having to choose between several interests. In high school I read Margaret Mead; anthropologists were people who described the world in terms different from those operable in my high school. This had to be a good thing.

**MH:** How has your research changed during the 30 plus years you’ve been working in the field?

**LK:** I started with an interest in gender. In grad school we began to realize that most anthropologists described societies through an almost exclusively male lens. There were exceptions; these were rediscovered as lost classics. It was an interesting time for a woman studying anthropology. I was also influenced by I.M. Lewis’ *Ecstatic Religion* which described shamans as male and empowered while possession cult devotees were supposedly female and oppressed. I’d seen enough shamans in Korea to question this—most were women and they seemed pretty forceful; that was the subject of my first book. My next project dealt with contemporary weddings. In the village where I did my first fieldwork, daughters’ weddings were very different from their mothers’. I was interested in how people described positive and negative aspects of “tradition” and “modernity” when speaking about changing marriage practices, and how weddings signified masculinity/femininity and rising expectations in the ROK in the 1980s and early 1990s. I observed class differences in these processes that were absent in my early village-centric fieldwork. My work with shamans never stopped. In 1989, Diana Lee and I made a film about a shaman’s initiation, which led to a new project. Many shamans’ clients seemed to be petty entrepreneurs; I started thinking about the nature of risk and how market anxieties are articulated in the shamans’ world. I remain interested in how popular religion is expressed in such a hypermodern place as South Korea. My current project concerns sacred objects and markets: things that are made and sold for sacred uses and things that used to be made for sacred uses but have been tweaked and sold as cultural artifacts. This interest began in Vietnam with a collaborative study on temple statues; I thought of finding a Korean parallel. I’m working on a book about shaman paintings but also toward a broader discussion of sacred objects and markets drawing on research from Korea, Vietnam, and some brief encounters in Burma and Bali.

**MH:** Final question: what sorts of things or people inspire your research projects?

**LK:** I am thrilled by the presence of magic in the contemporary world and gravitate toward people who like to talk about it in matter of fact ways, and of course I’m always partial to a good storyteller. On the other hand, would-be mystics give me hives.

# A Special Thank You

The Center for Korean Research would like to thank Professor Charles Armstrong for his unwavering leadership and his steadfast dedication to the Center and to Korean studies. Professor Armstrong's vast knowledge and expertise in topics related to Korea has inspired hundreds of undergraduate and graduate students. His use of real people's stories makes all discussions—no matter how theoretical or complex—understandable to a general audience and adds a personal dimension to Korean Studies.



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