
The Centre of Korean Studies (CKS) at the University of London School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), one of the largest, oldest, and best equipped centers of its kind outside of Korea, celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2012. SOAS is also the birthplace of the Association of Korean Studies in Europe (AKSE), today the largest such association worldwide, which was initiated in 1977 by the founder of Korean Studies at SOAS, William E. (Bill) Skillend (1918-2010). It is only appropriate that this volume is dedicated to this pioneer of London, and in fact British and European, Korean Studies.

The volume brings together nineteen papers by European, Korean, and American scholars, most of them former students or otherwise connected with SOAS, who had presented their research in seminars and conferences at the CKS. These papers were selected and organized into four parts according to research areas, namely: 1. History, 2. North Korea, 3. Literature, Philosophy, and Society, and 4. Music, Heritage, and Art. A “List of Contributors” (ix-xxii), giving short biographical notes provides useful background knowledge that helps readers to better understand the papers. Unfortunately the “Chronology” (xxiii) is so full of glaring mistakes and slips of the pen as to make it useless. In some parts of the book, proofreading did not receive adequate attention. For instance, in the bibliographic information on Martina Deuchler’s book published in 1977 the date is given as 1978 (only in the text on page 1; it is not given at all in the “Bibliography” on page 19).

Noticeable for this reviewer is the absence of linguistics, reflecting the fact that studies on language, which used to be in the centre in Korean Studies during its earlier years, gave way to the study of other aspects of Korean culture as the field matured and developed through research based on different methods. Most of the articles are well researched and written and I feel that the book should be in the hands of every teacher introducing Korean culture and moreover, that it should be on the bookshelf of every student.

The papers are preceded by an introductory essay entitled, “Introduction: Sixty Years of Korean Studies at SOAS,” by the editor Andrew David Jackson, a vivid account of the ups and downs of the field of Korean Studies before it became the established discipline it is today, not only at SOAS, but all over the world.
This article shows how SOAS and Bill Skillend were always a great help during the foundation period of Korean Studies in all of Europe, even long before the CKS was established. The description of the political situation in the early second half of the 20th century, which made it very difficult to establish Korean Studies as an academic research area sandwiched between Chinese and Japanese Studies (not only in London, but in all universities in Europe), is important background information for those reading academic papers and books from that period. And of equal importance is the information given about the change of the character of European universities from elite academic institutions to their role today as schools preparing students for careers.

The articles are divided into four parts and I will now briefly introduce the contributions that follow the introduction in the order they are presented.

**Part One: History**

*Tobacco and the Gift Economy of Seoul Merchants in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Owen Miller, 27-40)

This article examines account book data detailing the astonishing amount of tobacco given as gifts among members of the Guild of Domestic Silk Merchants in late 19th-century Seoul to interpret the social functions of these gifts and explain why tobacco took a leading role in this segment of the economy. This paper also offers background knowledge about the age-old tradition of guilds as a typical form of commercial organization with their own markets. A detailed account of the records of expenses for tobacco is included in a description of all other expenses of the governing body of the guild, showing its importance.

*India as Viewed by Ancient and Mediaeval Koreans—focusing on the Karak Kukki* (Records of Karak State) (Vladimir Tikhonov, al. Pak Noja, 41-59)

The article stresses the fact that, contrary to the stereotype of “Korea: a Confucian country,” for almost half of the two thousand years of attested history Korea was predominantly a Buddhist country. The author also demonstrates that the view of Korean cultural history *in toto* as sino-centric is an over-simplification because for long periods India-centrism was a powerful rival to sinocentrism, especially in Buddhist Korea (even in China, looking to India was at times an almost equal possibility side by side with the idea of the “Middle Kingdom”).

Tikhonov examines the part of the foundation myth of Karak (traditionally AD 425-562), where a princess is being sent from “Ayut’a” (according to the modern Korean pronunciation of the Chinese characters; Ayodhya in India) to become the consort of its first king, as the basic text to interpret the role of India in early Korean intellectual history in a new way. The princess was protected on her sea voyage by Buddhist holy objects, and there are more stories with Buddhist elements connected with the later queen and the founding king. Karak (which is alternatively known as Kara, Imna, or Karyang, and today mainly called Kaya or Gaya), which flourished during the first half of the first millennium on the southern coast of the peninsula, was in AD 562 “incorporated” into Silla (trad. 52 BC-AD 668, and continuing until 935 after defeating Paekche and Koguryo), and the 12th- and 13th-
century authors of the oldest surviving historiography books traced their lineage from there. While presented as background, in reality the most important part of the paper, along with the analysis of the place of the compiler’s ancestry in this history, is the explanation of the intellectual and political history leading into the 13th century, when this myth was recorded. Together, the sweeping overview of the transmission of Buddhism through China to Korea and the changes in focus along the way, the role Buddhism played in the formation of early Korean kingdoms, and the identities of the ruling classes are used to formulate a plausible theory explaining the time and reason for the creation of this myth and its content. The myth is—by referring to other foundation myths in Korean culture—interpreted as a mix of Korean mythology and Indian influences.

Unfortunately a serious problem is demonstrated in this otherwise excellent paper: the danger of navel-gazing, which is unfortunately rampant in Korean Studies’ scholarship today. This tendency to address not a general academic audience but only fellow Korean Studies’ scholars or people with a thorough background knowledge of Korean culture is one of the reasons why in the academic world, as well as among the general public, knowledge about Korea and the image of Korea are in such a dire need of correction.

A reader unfamiliar with the “Karak State” will be confused by the many different “Karaks” from various countries that appear through an internet search, and will probably turn to the “Index,” where on page 299 the only relevant entry is again “Karak kukki,” causing the reader to remember from the title that this is the “Records of the”—for him unknown—“Karak State.” Forgetting to enter a separate entry for “Karak” referring to a short introductory description in the text of when and where this entity existed (which is also missing in the text, this information given only in bits passim at various places) would have been a must if the editor also had non-specialist readers in mind (and the editor mentions a “wider community” on page 18 at the end of his Introduction). Of course, “the entry “Karak kukki” refers to pages “51, 52-4, 58,” but many readers might not have the patience to search for the passim mentioning that “Kùngwan, as well as other Kaya proto-states, known originally as Kara, Imna, Karak [sic] or Karyang…were renamed as Kaya….“ The reader who looks at the “Chronology” (xxiii) will be confused, as there is again no mention of “Karak,” but only the name “Kaya,” which is unknown to him or her. The same is true for the map on page 45.

Northern Territories and the Historical Understanding of Territory in Late Chosôn (Anders Karlsson, 61-77)

A solution for the recent political dispute between Korea and China, whether Koguryŏ (trad. 37 BC-AD 668) is part of Korean or of Chinese history, can only be found when historians on both sides cooperate. The problem lends itself easily to nationalistic slogans, and so politicians on both sides use their arguments in both internal politics and in a diplomatic tug-of-war, thereby widening the gap between the various sides. It is therefore necessary to understand the difference between earlier perceptions of territory and borders, and how they changed during the emergence of modern nationalism. After all, Koguryŏ was founded in what is today
the Manchurian part of China, with the capital being moved southward to the Korean peninsula only later.

The author explains as a model case the original neglect of Parhae (Chin. Bohai, 698-926) in Korean historiography and the discussions since the 18th century about whether or not to include this kingdom as part of Korean history. Parhae, its territory having covered (like Koguryō) parts of Manchuria and the northern half of the Korean peninsula, is an interesting case, as the majority of the population were non-Korean Manchurian tribes and the ruling class was formed by more culturally advanced leaders from Koguryō, which had been destroyed in 668 by Silla, and which has always been considered a part of Korean history. The discussion of this issue was especially difficult because the Qing dynasty, which ruled China from 1644 to 1912, claimed Manchu identity. This article therefore sheds light on the development of traditional historiography before the changes in modern Korean scholarship.

Outside of Korean studies “Parhae” is better known by the Chinese pronunciation of the two Chinese characters as “Bohai,” but this pronunciation is unfortunately not listed in the “Index” (navel-gazing again). It is also obvious from the bibliography that this article did not take into account the Western sinological and the Japanese research on Bohai, but relies instead on Korean research.

*Nation, Ethnicity, and the Post-Manchukuo Order in the Sino-Korean Border Region* (Charles Kraus and Adam Cathcart, 79-99)

This paper complements the previous one by discussing some problems regarding the people of Korean descent in the Chinese region north of the Korean border. The legal status of Chinese citizens with a Korean identity living together with peoples having a Chinese identity in an area with limited autonomy, such as Yanbian today, is the result of a process where “homeless” peoples were given (and/or formed) an identity of a special kind. Politicians and administrators had to solve problems of territory, of ethnic and linguistic, as well as cultural diversity, all during a time where difficult Chinese and North Korean nationalistic disputes among the “brothers” in communist (r)evolutions also had to be settled.

**Part Two: North Korea**, Introduction (103-05)

*Rousing the Reader to Action: North Korean Wartime Literature* (Jerôme de Wit, 107-22)

Starting with the observation that “North Korean literature is analyzed for its inherent political message rather than its literary qualities…” (107), the author continues to explain that wartime literature was different from that which preceded and followed it. Rather than being “mainly appreciated for its ideological quality, and especially for its adherence to the Juche doctrine” (110) and avoiding “groundless claims that the war was going well, when large numbers of people had direct evidence to the contrary” (111), wartime literature attempted to “stir the reader into action through hatred [of the enemy, especially the USA,] instead of ideology” (111). This article also points out how individual authors and critics interpreted directives given by Kim Il Sung in their own terms in an attempt to write “good” literature. The better ones were able to create heroes with convincing
personalities and to address social issues in spite of the limits and parameters they had to work within.

**State Power and Hegemonic Values: Media Coverage of the Super Bowl and Arirang Mass Games** (Andray Abrahamian, 123-33)
The Super Bowl of the National Football League of the USA and the Arirang Mass Games of the DPRK are two spectacular sporting events that can be compared as patriotic games affirming the respective assumed cultural and political values in these two otherwise very different countries. In the Super Bowl event “[c]ommon American mythical memes are referenced…community, teamwork and selflessness provide the backdrop for the success of the outstanding lone hero” (125), while Kim Jong Il declared that the Arirang Mass Games are “important in training school children to be fully developed communist people” and “teach organization, discipline and collectivism” (127). Both games are accompanied by patriotic rhetoric and a show of military force in order to instill the feeling of living in a strong and wonderful country in the spectators. The author compares the coverage of these events in English-speaking media and discovers that they are functionally similar in that in both cases patriotism and glorification of the military are at the center much more than the sports themselves. However, despite this similarity, in the Western media the Super Bowl is uncritically reported as a “mix of competition, advertising and fun,” while reports on the Arirang Mass Games negatively present them as “propaganda.”

**How North Korea Made its English-Korean Dictionary** (Lee Heejae, 135-50)
The article attempts to show how far lexicographers in both Koreas differ in respect of their use of “native Korean” roots or Chinese characters when coining new words or when they have to choose among synonyms, and how much they depend on Japanese dictionaries. The conclusion is: “…one of the main reasons why South Korea has repeatedly failed [sic!] to create and preserve its own tradition in English-Korean translation is that it failed (emphasis mine) to resist the temptation of relying on Japanese lexicography and its shared use of Chinese characters.” This is a gross over-simplification, not taking into account that a great number of South Korean scholars support keeping the knowledge of Chinese characters alive with an argument well worth considering, that “throwing away our more than 1000-year-old tradition” does not make sense. I think a scholar teaching outside of Korea should be neutral in this case. The conclusion goes on to say: “…North Korea, on the other hand, while it also copied Japan, relied more on its strong tradition of word creation and replacement in the name of refining the lexicon…” The “strong tradition” in this last sentence is not verbatim explained in the text, but—since no other tradition is mentioned—seems to refer to the language purification policy based on two speeches by Kim Il Sung presented in 1964 and 1966 (but the bibliography mentions only a later reprint of 1982). The use of “South Korea” and “North Korea” as actors in these and similar statements is, of course, very problematic in various respects, but mainly because it is scholars and politicians (better: “politicians and scholars”) who are acting. Given the power of
the administrational centre in North Korea it may be permissible to use the phrase “North Korea” instead of “scholars in North Korea,” when one does not want to go into detail, but in the case of “South Korea” this usage does not make any sense at all. Scholars in South Korea are not united in their views about a preferred or even “correct” lexicon or the necessity and the methods of coining new words, and the development of the language is definitely not uni-directional there but left open to changes that are outside the hands of scholars or politicians (descriptive lexicology vs. prescriptive lexicology).

Moreover, in South Korea there are scholars who advocate a purification of the language very similar to the principles followed in North Korea. This is no wonder, as the South Korean purists and the North Korean purists are both scholars in a tradition that goes back to nationalists working against the Japanese cultural policy during the colonial occupation. Some members of the Chosŏn-ohakhoe (Korean Language Society) went north after division and became the fathers of modern linguistics there. Others remained in the south, renamed their association the Han’gŭl Society in 1949, and subsequently exerted great influence in language policy discussions to the present.

This article fails to convince because the tradition of the Korean Language Society and the influence it had in both countries is not given proper acknowledgment, thus leading to misunderstandings. To take just one example, the term sorimadi for “syllable,” which the author claims to be a “newly coined word… based on native Korean morphemes” in the North Korean Yongjo taesajŏn [Grand English-Korean Dictionary], published in 1992, was not in fact a term coined by North Korean scholars, but was instead used for quite some time before 1992 in the tradition of the Korean Language Society. I am not sure when and by whom it was created, but it had already appeared, not in North Korea, but in South Korea, in the Kugŏ-kungmunhak sajŏn published in 1971 in Seoul by Hŏ Ung and Pak Chihong, two scholars in the Han’gŭl Society tradition.

Unfortunately here too more careful proofreading was needed: yeychwi appears several times as ayeychwi, and yecho is written ayecho (136fn5); the final Chinese character in the name Inouye Tetsujiro is written with radical 163 (郞) in footnote 5 on page 140, but with radical 74 (朗) in the bibliography on page 149; the syllable division for cikkelyeto should be ci-kkelyeto and not cik-kelyeto (145); 스펜더드 (“standard”) in McCune-Reischauer romanization should be sût’aendadû and not sût’aentatû as it appears on page 149, and so on.

There is one more critical remark that should be made: works are mentioned in the bibliography that do not seem to have any direct connection to the article.

**Part Three: Literature, Philosophy, and Society**, Introduction (Literature, 153; Philosophy and Society, 153-54)

*The Task and Risk of Translating Classical Sijo: Yun Sŏndo and Hwang Chini* (Hye-joon Yoon, 155-68)

The author begins this article by giving various reasons why, in comparison with the literature in other languages with a long written history, traditional Korean literature is practically unknown worldwide. His central argument is that this is
due to the un-literary translations of this literature and therefore proposes ways by which its prosody, rhythm, and imagery can be transposed to a certain extent in the balancing act between readability in the target language and maintaining “cultural otherness” while avoiding unnecessary exoticism. He bases his argumentation on an analysis of the languages of both the Korean original and the English translations, and if available compares different translations of well-known poems. In place of a conclusion the author's translations of the short poems he discussed are left “to the reader to judge.”

Wandering Bodies, Wondering Minds—the Body, Territory and National Identity in Pak Taewŏn, Ch’oe Inhun and Chu Insŏk’s Stories about Kubo (Justyna Najbar-Miller, 169-86) Pak Taewŏn’s 1934 story “A Day in the Life of Kubo” (1934) has inspired Ch’oe Inhun and Chu Insŏk to write similar stories (1969-1972 and 1995 respectively) of one day in the life of a writer living in the capital who keenly observes the social reality around him and struggles to understand where his own place should be. The three authors reflect on different times of social injustice; Pak Taewŏn on the Japanese occupation, Ch’oe Inhun on the colonial past and the Cold War, and Chu Insŏk on post-industrial society. This article summarizes the three different works and stresses the importance of the body: “…a closer analysis of the bodily subjectivity of each Kubo helps us to understand the colonial situation of Korea, the situation of national division, and the relations between dominance and subordination in the period of military dominance in South Korea” (184).

Reviving the Confucian Spirit of Ethical Practicality: Tasan’s Notion of Sŏng (‘Nature’) and Sim (‘Heart/Mind’) and their Political Implication (Daeyeol Kim, 187-202) Tasan Ch’ŏng Yagyong (1762-1836) was one of the greatest thinkers and officials in Korean history. Tasan belonged to the reformist “Practical Learning School” (Sirhak-pa),” where it was argued that scholarship should be judged not by philosophical sophistication but by practical effects and should consider the realities in Korea rather than blindly following the Chinese example. After a career as high-level bureaucrat, Tasan spent the second part of his life studying and writing in exile. This article explains Tasan’s position that virtue is not given by human nature but is a command from heaven, and that while man should follow this command, he has the freedom to choose between good and evil. The king’s power then lies in his self-perfection as role-model for the people, thereby cultivating their morality. The desire to do good is not the Sŏng (‘Nature’) of man but the Sim (‘Heart/Mind’), which means politically that if the sovereign “loves the people” the “people love each other,” a “result arising from the virtuous behavior of a ruler who applies himself to his self-perfection” (200).

Shamans, Ghosts and Hobgoblins amidst Korean Folk Customs (Michael J. Pettid, 203-19) The author begins his conclusion with the following words: “The shamanic worldview strives to maintain a balance between gods and humans, between harmful and beneficial spirits, and also between the individual and the community. Folk customs based on this worldview follow the same pattern, and strive to keep
the cosmos in relative balance.” In the pages leading to this statement he explains various functions of shamans in historical perspective, and describes folk customs, most of which are seasonal, some of which require a shaman’s participation and some of which do not, and how they share the same functions.

**Part Four: Music, Heritage and Art, Introduction (223-25)**

*The Five Surviving P’ansori Repertoires: Themes, Issues and the Connection to India* (Dorothea Suh, 227-39)

P’ansori is a form of “traditional Korean folk music” (227) in the sense of being music that is passed on from generation to generation through oral tradition. It is, however, also a highly sophisticated performance art which requires years and years to learn in a fixed order the five surviving pieces of the repertoire while at the same time learning Chinese characters and basic syntax in order to understand the many Chinese passages that appear in them. One master singer stressed that an uneducated singer is inadequate, the ideal being “a well-educated singer, well versed in music, aesthetics, literature and philosophy” (231). The author shows how the highly sophisticated culture of p’ansori, which shows Chinese influence re-interpreted in Korea, uses plots that come originally from the Indian Buddhist Jakata tales. The result is an intellectually complex art form blending all philosophies and beliefs that are part of the Korean culture, but interpreted from the requisite deeply emotional attitude obtained through the painful experiences of the individual singer’s life.

1910-1911: Years that Changed Seoul’s Music (Sung-Hee Park, 241-52)

Like in all other areas in Korean culture, in this short period, when the gradual increase of Japanese influence reached a climax in the complete colonization of Korea, dramatic changes in the culture of music took place. The Royal Music Institute (Changagwon) was dissolved and privatized, associations for female entertainers (Kisaeng Chohap) based on new regulations were formed, the Choson Institute for Proper Music (Choson Chongak Chonsuipo) was founded, and a *Song Collection for General Education* (Pot’ong Kyoyuk Ch’anggajip) was published. The functional re-interpretation in the music scene, the changes in the social background of its patrons, and how this turning point in the various styles all still today influence the music scene are skillfully explained starting with an early 19th-century map of Seoul on which the places where patrons and performers lived and performed are marked.

*Heritage Practices during the Park Chung Hee Era* (Codruta Sintionean, 253-74)

This article shows how, very early on during his rule, Park Chung Hee realized that the creation of a patriotic interpretation of history and a heritage conservation policy could be used to instill a desired “Korean” identity, including the notion that in the divided country South Korea is the rightful heir of the true tradition of the country. Another related policy sought to mold Korean citizens into people ready to defend the country and to work as unselfish heroes for economic development. This article shows how government organizations dealing with the preservation of
heritage, which worked together with scholars, based their strategies on institutions that operated during the Japanese occupation, and how they adapted these strategies during Park Chung Hee’s time in accordance with changing cultural policies that reflected economic and political developments.

*Korean Art Objects at SOAS* (Charlotte Horlyck, 275-96)

After a short overview of Korean Art collections in Europe and the SOAS collections from other cultures, the Korean art objects kept at SOAS are introduced together with stories about their acquisition and former owners. Some of these objects are hidden in thematic collections together with similar objects from other cultures. Notable are small funeral objects, a large porcelain jar (“Moon Jar”), manuscripts, hand scrolls, and early modern paintings by Unbo Kim Kichang (1914-2001). The special characteristics of the works, technical details, and their historical and former social significance are explained well, without the use of special terminology a non-specialist might find difficult to understand.

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BOOK REVIEW


When the Future Disappears explores how Korean poets, philosophers, essayists, and literary critics in late colonial Korea had difficulty conceptualizing or narrating the future because of increasingly oppressive state policies and the inequalities that resulted from the uneven progress of modernization. In the place of this “disappearing future,” these writers turned to various literary devices that focused on Korea’s precolonial past and the banal nature of everyday life. Janet Poole also investigates the presence of Japanese fascism in Korean society and literature during what is commonly referred to as the dark period of colonial Korea (1937-1945).

I admit early in this review that I wish Poole had written this book differently. I opened the book expecting an analysis that was grounded concretely in historical events. As a historian, I hoped to see how these writers discussed Korean nationalism or interacted with the colonial state. Instead, When the Future Disappears delves deeply into the abstract world of theory, philosophy, and literary criticism. I must grant that this work does not claim to be anything more than an intellectual and literary history of late-colonial Korea that investigates the responses of Korea’s literary figures to the intensification of Japan’s assimilation policies and inequalities prevalent in Korean society. Poole shows that Korean writers responded with “abstraction, irony, paradox, and even silence” (book jacket). While this was not the book I hoped for, it was a thoughtful exposition into Korean colonial fascism, modernism, and literature.

Each chapter of the work analyzes the response of a specific writer or literary critic to either the “disappearing future” or the encroachment of fascism into Korean society. For example, Ch’oe Myöngik responded to the unpredictable future by writing with powerful observation and intense detail “to represent the growing complexity of urban life” (43). The characters in Ch’oe’s stories confronted the “dynamic dissonance” of everyday life instead of facing an uncertain future. Throughout his works, Ch’oe suggested that his characters—much like the Korean bourgeoisie, lived double lives because they were alienated on the edge of society between the ruler and the ruled; they could not fully pursue a bourgeois life, nor could they escape the slums.

Só Insik, a former communist revolutionary, on the other hand, initially responded to the uncertain future by focusing on the inequalities that came with modernity. Poole’s discussion of Só, a philosopher, centers on his writings that critiqued nostalgia and tradition. Specifically, Só believed that progress and destiny gave way to the contradictions and uncertainties of colonial society and, as a result, were being replaced by nostalgia and decadence. By the early 1940s, Só stopped publishing his writings when the imperialization policies required all printed
Poole’s discussion of Yi T’aejun’s anecdotal essays that engaged in his “epiphanic communion” with old antiques, such as pots or water droppers, shows the social and ideological contradictions faced by the Korean bourgeoisie. Yi’s romantic antiquarian sentimentalism exhibited how memory impinged on daily life as he depicted each item's lived experience. Conversely, Yi also straddled the traditional and modern worlds because he wrote travelogues of his tours of Manchuria. Ironically, these writings exhibited an awe of imperial Japan’s modernization efforts in Manchukuo and even employed pan-Asian themes to “legitimate the contemporary empire through a culturalist vision of the past” (107).

Poole then explores the stories of Pak Taewŏn, which arose from the newly formed urban periphery outside Seoul’s old city walls. In this urban frontier zone, Pak explored the convergence of the global economy, colonial urban planning, and precolonial memory—all of which left a gap between the capital city and national culture. All the while, Japan became mired more deeply in a war with China and then America. The city walls, for Pak, signified a “complex entanglement of temporalities” and the failure of Koreans to defend their heritage. The linear narrative of the nation in his writings is replaced by the peri-urban frontier where his characters experience repetitive everyday lives. Pak’s stories explore the minutiae and dissonance of daily life which is fraught with an unstable moral order. His works show that people's dreams of the future could not be discarded, nor could they be accepted. Poole explores this contradiction in light of his characters’ double exposure to the domestic interior and the colonial interior, particularly in relation to the colonial regime’s linguistic policy that increasingly promoted the use of the Japanese language instead of Korean.

Probably the most famous writer that Poole examines is Ch’oe Chaesŏ, an eminent literary critic. Whereas the other authors included in this book avoided political issues by writing about photographs, antiques, city walls, or details in everyday life, Ch’oe actively advocated Japanese fascism and publically supported its mobilization efforts, going so far as to call modern warfare the ultimate display of beauty (174). Ch’oe was a fascist modernist who felt Korean society suffered from the decadence of individualism and capitalism; he believed that the fascist imperial state could resolve Korea's problems by providing an authentic culture.

The final chapter analyzes the “impact late colonial language policies had on the modernist imagination” (179) in the early 1940s as fascism became more overt in the colonial regime’s language policies. The forced closure of Korean-language journals and newspapers forebode the disappearance of the Korean language for many of these writers. Equally problematic for Korean intellectuals, Korea was reconstituted as a region, rather than colony, of Japan. Thus, the status of Korea's fragile bourgeois class grew more uncertain as the war progressed. Poole shows how artistic freedom declined, forcing literary figures to either express themselves in Japanese (and in state-defined ways) or to go silent.

When the Future Disappears skillfully unveils a much more personal side of colonial Korea than most academic works. Through the eyes of fictional characters in Pak Taewŏn’s and Ch’oe Myŏngik’s stories, Poole provides a vivid
image everyday life of late-colonial Korean society. Whether the protagonist is standing in the shadows of Seoul's city walls or standing outside a portrait shop in Pyongyang, the reader is able to understand the dissonance experienced by the Korean people. Furthermore, the book also explores the personal thoughts of many of these writers. Each author's choice of whether to go silent or to continue to write in Japanese is closely scrutinized. This sort of personalized approach is too often missing from historical works.

Conversely, the book does not delve deeply into the standard historical issues. With the exception of the government-general’s language policies, Poole eschews discussion of the colonial government's relationship with Korean society, its educational policies, or Korean nationalism. The book would have benefited from a more thorough discussion of the inequalities and dissatisfactions that motivated each of the writers under consideration; many of the writers are discussed in a vacuum. Also, excepting Ch’oe Chaesô, there is little effort to connect most writers with their ideological foundations. Several of them were former communists, but Poole does not explain the degree to which their writings continued to be influenced by Marxism.

The discussion of these writers and philosophers is highly theorized and is seldom contextualized within broader historical issues. Much of the writing centers on modernity, paradox, temporality, and interiority—creating an abstract writing style that can be taxing. Of course, to be transparent, I admit that I prefer historical studies that are not dominated by abstract theories. While Poole offers glimpses into everyday life and the thoughts of Korean intellectuals, I suspect that this book will appeal mostly to scholars and graduate students who appreciate literature and a theoretical approach to history.

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This study is an ambitious effort to utilize new materials and methods to revisit a fundamental issue in Chinese historiography: the Tang-Song transition from “aristocratic” to “gentry” society. The materials in question are tomb inscriptions; their novelty as sources lies not in the use of epigraphy per se, but in Tackett’s inclusion of a massive corpus of excavated biographical materials rather than individual instances. Methodologically, this study seeks through analysis of a database with key information about members of the 9th century political elite to better understand the latter’s composition; the database used is provided online, enabling readers to trace his analysis and explore related questions.

Tackett seeks to critique narratives that locate the shift in elites long before the end of the Tang. One is the idea that meritocratic civil service examinations brought “new men” into power at the expense of the established families, a view already out of favor among academic historiographers, and which Tackett dismisses largely by reference to previous scholarship. His primary target is the narrative portraying the 755-763 rebellion of An Lushan 安祿山 and Shi Siming 史思明 as irrevocably weakening the power of the Tang state, allowing new elites to emerge in the provinces. Instead Tackett finds that political power remained in the hands of elite families based in the Tang capital region (Chang’an, Luoyang, and secondarily in the corridor between them) until the rebellion of Huang Chao 黃巢 in the early 880s. In the language of contemporary China studies, Tackett’s main thesis is that the elite dominating the Tang bureaucracy maintained cohesion and control through a mutually reinforcing and perpetuating guanxi network 關係網. In the violence of the late 9th century, much of the network of elites was destroyed, and with it the interconnections that constituted much of their social capital and through which their political power had been exerted. Many of the trends identified in this study are not new to the mainstream of Tang historiography. The value of an argument lies at least as much in the rigor of its proof as in the novelty of its claims, however, and it is here that Tackett’s book serves as a watershed in the social historiography of medieval China.

A key methodological move concerns the criteria by which analytically significant kinship units are defined and delineated. Tackett largely abandons the terms by which individuals and their biographers expressed their own identity and place in society, and which had served as the chief analytical category of previous studies: clans, each identified by a shared surname and affiliated with a particular geographic place of origin or “choronym,” (e.g., the Cui family of Boling Commandery 博陵崔氏). Finding that over 90% of known individuals’ epitaphs or biographies either claimed membership in such a family or were linked by
marriage to one who could, Tackett argues that by the 9th century the number of claimants to aristocratic “great clan” identity made each clan too large to behave as a cohesive group (38). He finds further that these “clans” seemed to have no permanent landholdings in their purported home areas (39), that the “home base” of an individual and his/her immediate family was more accurately indicated by location of burial, as reflected by their epitaphs (73-81), and that most individuals’ permanent residence had no relation to the location designated in their choronym (47-50).

Within the broadly dispersed group of aristocratic descendants identified by surname and choronym only, Tackett identifies a subset, based in the capitals and thus termed by him the “capital elite,” who held bureaucratic office for successive generations and largely crowded residents of other regions out of high posts (84-87). Through tracing marriage patterns, he further subdivides these capital elites into two “cliques.” His Clique A chiefly consisted of civil officials and their relations in Luoyang, many of whom overlapped with the old northeastern aristocracy, while Clique B comprised a more diverse group of civil and military elites based in Chang’an, of whom the imperial family were only the most prominent members (123-25). At an intermediate level between individuals and these two cliques is the “patriline,” which Tackett defines as “the largest cluster of blood relatives that can be reconstructed on the basis of documented father-son (or father-daughter) relationships” (108).

These patrilines—labeled “clans” in Tackett’s database—possess sizes and boundaries determined by the limitations of his evidence, and should not be assumed to correspond to groups that behaved as discrete units in the manner of consciously organized lineages, or were considered as such by anyone in Tang society. While the insights Tackett provides from epigraphy regarding the geographic distribution of documented officeholders are invaluable, readers should remember that approximately 15,000, or nearly half, of the 32,909 individuals in the dataset used for his quantitative analyses of the elite are unattested in the epigraphic record. The family connections of these individuals are drawn from received texts, mainly the genealogical tables in the Xin Tang shu 新唐書 and other national genealogies from the Tang and Song (109-13). Often the database assigns dozens or even hundreds of such names to a single clan; while the inclusion of this genealogical data aids in identifying marriage and descent relationships, it can have the effect of skewing our picture of the “elite” to include members better known by chroniclers at the social center while excluding more geographically or socially marginal segments.

Many historians will take particular interest in Chapter Four, in which Tackett argues that even after the An Lushan rebellion the Tang remained a stable centralized empire until the rebellions of the late 870s. This is a dual argument: first, that the Tang court retained or regained centralized control even in the provinces after an upsurge in centrifugal forces beginning from the An Lushan rebellion and lasting through the 810s; and second, that the capital elite both relied on and reinforced this bureaucratic authority. Tackett argues that following court efforts to reassert control, after 820 provincial governors, their main subordinate
officials, and prefectural and county officials were appointed by the central bureaucracy, belonged to elite families in the capitals, and returned there after their provincial terms of service had ended (160-70). This demographic argument is a more convincing demonstration of central coordination than historians’ attempts to identify whether provincial appointments were decided by the central government or merely recognized by it post facto. Local families did, it appears, often provide low-ranking civil officials and military officials at all ranks in the provinces, but these men did not gain upward mobility into higher posts (173-78).

As evidence of the docility of provincial administrations from 820-80, Tackett notes that recorded mutinies were significantly less frequent in that period than before or after, and that the rebellions that eventually ended court control were not led by provincial officers (182). He seeks to show that the armed conflict throughout the empire from the 880s until the formal end of the Tang in 907 was of an unprecedented ferocity, and produced particularly catastrophic loss of life and property in the two capitals. Although he cites extensively from contemporary poems to illustrate extreme devastation in the capital region, it is difficult to establish definitively that these verses reflect qualitatively greater disaster than similar lamentations in other times of disorder, or that may have affected other Tang regions where contemporaneous accounts are scarcer. More convincing is Tackett’s quantitative demonstration that the number of epitaphs from Chang’an and Luoyang fell calamitously after 880—far more than after the An Lushan rebellion—indicating that social and economic conditions no longer allowed elite funerals, and by extension elite society more generally, at the scale previously seen (225-26). The sole exception to centralized control of the provinces in the 9th century were the three autonomous Hebei provinces—Youzhou 幽州, Weibo 魏博, and Chengde 成德. Into the political vacuum arose the new elites of the 10th century which, Tackett argues, reflected the more meritocratic ethos of the Hebei regimes (240-42).

Certain concerns are raised by this study that, while not undermining its conclusions, deserve consideration. Foremost is its reliance on etic categories: neither the “capital elite,” nor “Cliques” A and B, nor even the smaller lineage units which Tackett’s patrilines presumably approximate seem to have any reflection in the language of their contemporaries. We find no equivalent of the shidafu 士大夫 and xiangshen 鄉紳 categories described by historians of later periods, nor the rich lexicon employed in medieval texts in connection with lineage membership and social status drawn on by previous studies of the “great families.” This is not to say that the researcher’s own categories of analysis need be restricted to emic terms, but some consideration seems due to the consciousness of group membership and boundaries by social actors themselves.

A second question is that of how far group unity can be assumed. Mainstream narratives of late Tang history attribute the court’s loss of control primarily not to the rise of new elites or the treachery of provincial governors, but to divisions within the governing structure itself. Emphasized in particular are conflicts between factions of high officials, and the usurpation by eunuchs of authority previously held by bureaucrats and sovereigns. The data for this study
does offer new insights into factional divisions. For example, a preliminary look at the notorious Niu-Li Factional Struggle 牛李党争 finds the three key leaders of the Niu faction classified in “Chang’an” patrilines in Tackett’s database, while two of the three Li faction leaders belong to “Luoyang” patrilines. Perhaps in the future Tackett’s modeling of elite structure will be utilized for more thorough analyses of factional divisions. The reverse may be necessary as well, however: we must consider the implications of factional divisions for the thesis positing a single elite unified in pursuit and protection of its own interests. At the same time, conflicts between bureaucrats and eunuchs suggest that political power was no longer entirely reflected by bureaucratic posts.

A third question concerns the apparent abruptness of the Tang court’s loss of control. Tackett’s narrative would gain nuance and persuasive power by allowing that social trends through the mid-9th century may have had politically significant consequences. Its measure of effective centralization might incorporate historians’ findings that even “loyal” provincial administrations sent a smaller proportion of their revenue to the central government by midcentury. Its annual average count of mutinies could benefit from consideration of intensity, allowing the two larger mutinies of the 850s to prefigure that of Huang Chao. Although its introduction highlights the value of epitaphs for illuminating “the margins of the upper class,” including “merchants and major landowners” (9), the study focuses squarely on the capital elite with little mention of the local elites who would soon take lasting control of the civil bureaucracy. This is partly a feature of Tackett’s database, in which only 3.7% of elites listed are classified as non-officeholders and 0.076% as merchants. The growing economic power of merchants and landowners, explored by other scholars, was not reliant on officeholding and not reflected in the genealogies of established clans, but in light of its later significance should not be dismissed completely.

That these issues can be raised at all is a testament to the significance of this study for forcing the reexamination of old issues and the raising of new ones. It deserves careful reading by any scholar of pre-modern East Asia, and in the future is certain to have a tangible impact on the overall narratives by which Chinese history is traced.

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