



**Colonial Koreans Across Linguistic and National Boundaries:  
The Inaugural Conference of the March First Symposium on History and Democracy**

**ABSTRACTS**

**(Required for academic presentations only)**

***Session I. Presenting Song of Arirang: The Story of a Korean Revolutionary in China***

***Bringing Back Song of Arirang: A Publisher's Perspective***

**Sunyoung Lee | Chief editor, Kaya Press**

***Re-reading Song of Arirang from Regional Perspective***

**Dongyoun Hwang | Volume editor, Soka University**

The story of Kim San's life in *Song of Arirang* has approached in South Korea as part of its national independence movement against Japanese colonialism, while in China, exclusively within the context of the Chinese Revolution. To move away from the nation-based accounts of Kim San's life story, this talk suggests that *Song of Arirang* be read from regional perspective that underlines the direct and indirect interactions between him and other regional radicals in the formation of his idea for independence and revolution and the relationship of regional radical/revolutionary movements to one another, sometimes in tension but other times in tandem, by way of mutual inspiration, influence or actual participations. What *Song of Arirang* implies are, this talk suggests, the transnational linkages in the rise and development of radical/revolutionary movements in twentieth century East Asian societies.

## ***SESSION II. Negotiating Late Colonial Modernity: Korean Culture During World War II***

### **Problematizing ‘Collaborationist Literature’: Intersubjective Identity Construction in Yi Kwang-su and Ch’oe Chae-sŏ’s Late Colonial Writings**

**Kyu Hyun Kim | UC Davis**

This talk seeks to advance fresh interpretations of two major literary figures of colonial Korea, Yi Kwang-su (1892-1950) and Ch’oe Chae-sŏ (1908-1964), problematizing the characterizations of their wartime (1937-1945) writings as “collaborationist.” The literary values of their works in this period, some of which were written in Japanese, are dismissed partly due to their seeming subservience to the ideology of *naisen ittai/naesŏn ilch’e* (“Japan and Korea as One”), conventionally thought as a drive toward refutation or elimination of the Korean ethnic identity.

In this talk, I will propose a different interpretation of their writings emphasizing the dissonance between their overtly intellectual and ideological pieces and their fictions. I argue that both Ch’oe and Yi, upon accepting the conditions of colonial modernity as a given, attempted to reconfigure the “Korean” subjectivity in such ways that they could reformulate a Korean identity acceptable as a subject-citizen of the Japanese empire. Their strategies were strikingly different from one another, Ch’oe retreating to the historical past (in such works as *Minjok ūi kyŏrhon*) and documentary realism and Yi deploying affect and emotion to overcome the aporia of colonized subjectivity (in such works as *Kokoro ai furete koso* and *Hei ni nareru*).

This talk will illustrate how these strategies employed by Ch’oe and Yi ultimately imploded and failed to reconcile an imperative for imperial patriotism under wartime colonial conditions on the one hand and a need to articulate a viable (ethnic) Korean subjectivity on the other.

### **The Cultural Politics of Mobility: Fascism, Racial Capitalism, and Transborder Migration in Late Colonial Korea**

**Mi-Ryong Shim | University of Georgia**

Colonial domination is often envisioned in terms of confinements and enclosures, while flows and exchanges are linked with the politics of liberation or subversion of authority. Yet, the wartime Japanese empire entrenched its hegemony through channeling—and even facilitating—certain modes of transborder movement for the colonized, but in ways that were no less problematic than blocking them. This talk reveals such unfreedoms of mobility by examining works of pioneer literature (*kaech’ŏkmin munhak*), a distinct genre within Korean literature emerging after 1939 that narrated the lives of Korean immigrants in Manchuria. It analyzes how colonial writers highlighted the bloodline of the Korean diaspora to legitimate their movement within the expanding Japanese empire. The talk illuminates how, even as these literary works challenged the barriers set up against the free mobility of

Korean migrants, they did so by partially accepting the imperial logic of racial hierarchy and, moreover, turning to the authority of fascist race science to provide the colonial diaspora with biologically defined rights to settle in imperial territories beyond the colony.

## **Im Hwa Beyond Joseon Cinema: Reading a Transnational Film Theory in Colonial Korea**

**Jiwoong Choi | University of Southern California**

The colonial Korean writer Im Hwa has in recent decades garnered renewed interest in South Korea as one of the foremost literary theorists of the peninsula's modern era. Moreover, efforts have also been made to recenter Im's works on cinema—both as a critic and as an active participant in the production of films—as an early example of film theory in Korea.

This talk seeks to add to this growing discourse on Im's film theory, focusing on his theoretical reflections on a national cinema in colonial Korea. Film scholars Baek Moonim and Irhe Sohn have sustained a productive dialogue in this matter, offering their readings of Im's interdisciplinary use of his own notable literary theory of transplantation (*isik munhangnon*) to historicize a national cinema, a 'Joseon cinema.' However, their readings presuppose the nation-state as an indispensable framework in thinking about the films that were produced and watched in the peninsula. This talk proposes that Im's transplantation theory seeks to do away with the nation altogether, and that his 'Joseon cinema' looks beyond territorializing impulses for an emancipatory, post-national outlook. The term *isik*, or transplantation—written with the same Chinese characters in Korean, Mandarin, and Japanese—is also used by Japanese film critic Iwasaki Akira and Chinese writer Lu Xun to critique cinema as a tool of capitalist and imperial subjugation. This shared signifier, or 'linguistic super-sign' as termed by Lydia Liu, between the three East Asian writers allows a deeper, transnational examination of Im's prodigious post-national film theory in the early twentieth century.

### ***SESSION III. Remembering the Early Korean American Diaspora***

#### **Curating the Archives of the Korean National Association (1909-1988)**

**Kenneth Klein | USC Libraries**

Archived documents relating to the *Kungminhoe* (Korean National Association; KNA) are divided into three overlapping collections. The first and largest set of documents were sent from the KNA Building in Los Angeles to the Dosan Ahn Chang-Ho Memorial Foundation in Seoul and published in 23 volumes in 2005. The second set consisted of 5654 pages in 218 items that had not been included in the first set, but had been left in the KNA Building and

loaned to USC's Korean Heritage Library for inclusion in the initial founding materials digitized for the launching of the Korean American Digital Archive (KADA) in 2000. The third set consisted of 18,150 pages of materials that had been stored in the attic crawlspace of the KNA Building and rediscovered during a renovation project in 2001. This "Attic Collection" was finally loaned to USC's KHL in 2018 for digitizing prior to their being sent to the Independence Hall in Korea. The ways in which these materials are organized or presented differ, to a degree, according to whether they are considered "Korean archives" or "Korean American archive."

## **Koreans as 'Aboriginals': American Scholarly and Diplomatic Accounts of Korea, 1871-1905**

**John S. W. Park | UC Santa Barbara**

In addition to several well-known missionary accounts of Korea in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, several prominent Americans from diplomatic and intellectual circles also visited and then published accounts about Korea during this period. They included men like Percival Lowell, George Foulk, John Bernadou, and George Ladd. Together, their written reports were rather unflattering toward Koreans and toward the Joseon monarchy, as they wrote of how the Koreans were "stuck in an arrested development," "backward," "despotic," and "demon worshippers." Many of their passages remain pungent and colorful, even funny. And yet in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as Imperial Japan moved to assert its sovereignty over Korea, these American views of Korea help us understand how and why the United States had refused to intervene on behalf of the Joseon monarchy by 1905. By then, many elite Americans had concluded that Korea could not bring herself into modernity, and that the Japanese were in the best position to do this.

## **A Different Diaspora: Cross-Racial Encounters and the Possibilities of Solidarities in the Korean American Diaspora, 1907-1933**

**Youngoh Jung | University of Hawaii**

This talk examines alternative histories of cross-racial encounters and possibilities of solidarities formed in the Korean American diaspora from 1907-1933. Korean American histories of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century have mostly explored diasporic activism against Japanese colonialism buttressed by institutional relationships with prominent US figures forged by Korean political exiles, independent activists, and Protestant elites. While these histories reveal the foundational component of Korean American history, they overlook other perspectives beyond diasporic Korean American proximity to whiteness, the 'good immigrant' model minority narrative, and the nationalistic discourse of Korean independence from afar. Utilizing scattered newspaper articles on cross-racial encounters and writings by diasporic Korean American students, writers, and laborers during the first three decades of the 1900s; this talk focuses on how certain diasporic Koreans reacted to

racial violence and settler colonialism perpetuated by white Americans and governmental institutions on African American and Indigenous peoples in the continental US. By rethinking their status as colonized exiles alongside other oppressed groups, these Korean American narratives of cross-racial encounters and solidarities reveal how the diaspora can serve as a space where various place based liberatory struggles come together and different forms of worldmaking can be imagined collectively.