

Reconfiguring the Korean Diaspora

The Korean diaspora should not just be understood as a demographic category that encompasses Koreans and their descendants who live outside of the Korean Peninsula. It is a historical and socio-cultural field shaped by the biggest ruptures in modern Korean history: colonial rule, war and division, labour migration, forced displacement, marriage migration, educational and professional mobility, and the global circulation of Korean culture. Zainichi Koreans in Japan, early Korean immigrants in Hawai'i and North America, as well as Korean migrants in Europe have formed different configurations of Korean diasporic life. Their experiences show how Koreanness and belonging are maintained, transformed and contested through language, food, family, labour, gender, memory, and cultural practice.

In this special issue, *Reconfiguring Korean Diaspora: Socio Cultural, Historical and Literary Perspectives*, the Korean diaspora is approached as a plural and dynamic formation. Rather than treating diaspora as a fixed ethnic category, the contributions examine it as a set of lived practices, cultural memories, social relations, narrative forms, and symbolic negotiations. Bringing together literary analysis, film studies, ethnographic research, historical inquiry, gender studies, food studies, and the sociology of cultural practice, the issue seeks to contribute to Korean Studies and wider debates in diaspora studies and cultural sociology.

The five articles in the issue shed light on different dimensions of the Korean diaspora. They show the Korean diaspora is not limited to questions of migration and settlement, but may be interpreted and reconfigured via literary, cinematic, food cultural, musical, and historical approaches. In this way, diaspora emerges as a process of unstable belonging, cultural continuity, memory, care, and identity negotiation.

Kang Byoung Yoong's article "Biopolitical Diasporic Human Figures: Dystopian Narratives in the Works of Kazuo Ishiguro and Chang-rae Lee" opens the issue by linking diaspora to biopolitics and a dystopian narrative. Through Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* and Lee's *On Such a Full Sea*, it is argued that biopolitical power produces certain forms of life, sensibility and relationality. The biopolitical diasporic human figure is presented as a mode of existence marked by unstable protection and managed vulnerability.

Nataša Visočnik Gerželj's "The Story of Kimchi: Identity and Diaspora of Zainichi Koreans in Japan" moves from conceptual framing to everyday cultural practice. Focusing on kimchi and Zainichi Koreans, it considers how food has become a medium of identity negotiation, memory, and resistance to assimilation.

Kimchi appears as both a popularised food in Japanese society and a cultural anchor of Koreanness.

In Hur EuiJin's "Diaspora as Horror in *Peninsula*: A Psychoanalytic Perspective", the discussion expands to cinema. Interpreting Yeon Sang ho's *Peninsula* through Lacanian extimacy, it is argued that horror arises from the transformation of familiar spaces, names, and social relations. Diaspora is used as a cinematic figure of displacement, failed return, and symbolic exclusion.

Sun Young Yun's "Singing Belonging: A Korean Diaspora Women's Choir as a Cultural Practice and Community-Building in Austria" looks at the Korean diaspora in Europe via the Vienna Korean Women's Choir. Founded in 2007 by first-generation Korean migrant women in Austria, the choir is analysed as a gendered space of cultural memory, community care, and meaningful ageing. Singing has become a practice in which migrant women sustain their belonging and reposition themselves as active cultural agents.

Finally, in "The Reality and Self-Identity of Korean Women Immigrants to America in the Early 20th Century: A Comparative Analysis of Historical Records and Literary Works" Boram Han and Yesul Han return to the issue of the Korean diaspora's historical formation. By examining historical records, oral narratives of 'picture brides', and Eugenia Kim's *The Calligrapher's Daughter*, the authors challenge the marginalisation of women in accounts of early Korean migration to Hawai'i and the United States, revealing them to be historical subjects who exercised their agency through migration, education, family decisions, and establishing a community.

Altogether, the articles reimagine the Korean diaspora as a phenomenon of movement, memory, vulnerability, cultural creativity, and social practice. They invite us to think of diaspora not simply as a matter of origin and destination, but as an ongoing process in which individuals and communities make claims to their identity, belonging, care, visibility, and dignity. In this sense, the Korean diaspora is one of the key sites where the meanings of Korea, Koreanness, and global modernity are continually produced, negotiated and contested.

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