

Choonwon Cultural Exchange Center(CCEC) reception and panel discussion, in conjunction with the 2018 Association for Asian Studies meeting, March 24, 2018, Washington (DC) Marriott Wardman Park Hotel (Maryland C)

## **Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium in the Korean Humanities: Making Academic Research Accessible**

Young-Key Kim-Renaud  
The George Washington University

Distinguished speakers, ladies and gentlemen, I am honored and grateful to be invited to this very special reception and to join the august panel discussing about modern Korean writers and thinkers. I understand this program is organized by none other than Dr. Chungwha Lee Iyengar, daughter of the great writer and thinker, Yi Kwang-su, whose very name evokes Korea's modernization and the so-called "New Literature."

### **The Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium: one of a kind**

In 1995, the George Washington University established the annual colloquium in the Korean Humanities series ([eall.columbian.gwu.edu/hahn-moo-sook-colloquium](http://eall.columbian.gwu.edu/hahn-moo-sook-colloquium)), honoring Korea's modern writer, Hahn Moo-Sook (1918-1993), with an endowment provided by the estate of Hahn Moo-Sook in order to uphold her spirit of openness, curiosity, and commitment to education.

This was a landmark event in the history of Korean studies for the following reasons:

- 1) This was the first endowed colloquium series in Korean studies outside Korea and possibly anywhere, whose main objective is to connect academic research directly with the general public.
- 2) This is an unusual academic program in that it focuses on the humanities in a city where Korea-related conferences are overwhelmingly concerned with security and trade issues.
- 3) The HMS Colloquium provides a forum for wide-ranging academic discussion of Korean arts, history, language, literature, thought and religious systems in the context of East Asia and the world.
- 4) This endowed program honors a writer and a woman writer at that, Hahn Moo-Sook, which is untypical, as most of the endowment funds, especially in Korean studies, are supported by granting organizations such as the Korea Foundation or donors who are private corporations or their owners.

### **The first colloquium of 1995: learning by doing**

The very first Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium was held in October 1995 under the title, "Psyche and Cosmos in Traditional Korean Thought." Very unusually for any lecture or conference for Korean studies, almost 100 Washingtonian people from various walks of life attended this event. The *GW Chronicle of*

*Giving*, a GW magazine, carried a story about the Colloquium in its winter 1996 issue to announce the important new endowment that was funding this new Colloquium and also to report on the success of its first convening.

## West Meets East

### *Colloquium Series on the Korean Humanities*

The differences between the Eastern and Western ways of organizing and understanding human experience was the subject of George Washington University's first biennial Colloquium on the Korean Humanities. Sponsoring the November 4th meeting were The George Washington University's Korean Language and Culture Program, Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures, and

the Sigur Center for East Asian Studies. Currently funded by the Sigur Center, the colloquia will become a permanent fixture of the University thanks to a \$100,000 grant pledged by the Hahn Moo-Sook Foundation of Seoul, Korea. Madame Hahn, who died in 1993, was a prominent Korean writer and a friend of The George Washington University.

Addressing the topic, "Psyche and Cosmos in Traditional Korean Thought," were leading scholars of Neo-Confucianism, Michael C. Kalton from the University of Washington at Tacoma and Young-Chan Ro of George Mason University. Professor Young-Key Kim-Renaud, director of GW's Korean Language and Culture program and the initiator of



BOB NARRO

*Professors Young-Chan Ro (left), GW's Young-Key Kim-Renaud and Michael C. Kalton*

the colloquium series, presided. Kim-Renaud's desire to bring together a diverse group of Asian and Western scholars, intellectuals, business people and artists from GW and the city prompted her to organize the series. "My goal," says the popular GW professor, "was to create an environment in which those of different backgrounds could meet and engage in scholarly and friendly dialogue." giving

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This report on the birth of the HMS Colloquium Series conveyed well the spirit, goals and organizing elements of the HMS Colloquium that still prevail today. The main goal of this academic outreach program was to “create an environment in which those of different backgrounds [Koreans and others] could meet and engage in scholarly and friendly dialogue.” In choosing our speakers, we tried to get internationally recognized active researchers and those who could play a role as an authoritative voice to address a particular topic of interest and throw light on important and lasting elements of Korean culture and society. An important organizing principle was to seek a balanced view of the topic of the colloquium by choosing Korean and non-Korean scholars recognized for their knowledge of the subject and their ability to reach out to a broad public. The only change from this first announcement is the difference in the frequency of the colloquium. Instead of being a biannual [‘biennial’ was a typo] event,

it has been and remains an annual event because a 12-month lead period proved to be necessary to insure the quality of each colloquium.

The Colloquium has been open to the public without restrictions. It is free of charge, although it has always included a breakfast for socializing time and a sit-down lunch to encourage dialog among participants. However, this would not have been the main reason for which people sacrificed their weekend rest and other leisure activities. The popularity of the HMS Colloquium is largely due to the fact that we foster interdisciplinary and intercultural dialogue and enrichment by engaging in a humanistic approach to explore the issues of interest to today's Koreans and to the world surrounding them. Our audience reflects the highly educated general public of the Washington, DC, metropolitan area as well as our own GW faculty and students.

### **Building bridges and partnerships**

For nearly a quarter of a century, many parts of the University have joined the Colloquium as co-organizers and/or sponsors, depending on the topics covered, but the most important, long-lasting and enthusiastic GW supporter has been the Sigur Center for Asian Studies. Even more significantly, major external organizations supporting Korean studies, both domestic and foreign, such as various parts of the Smithsonian Institution, the Korean Cultural Center of the Korean Embassy, the Literature Translation Institute of Korea, and the Korea Foundation, have recognized the importance of the HMS Colloquium and provided support. Often, they have participated in the actual planning and execution of particular projects, even offering their facilities off campus like the Smithsonian Institution and the Korean Cultural Center. Our Colloquium has been reported not only on local Korean news media, but also in major Korean media, as well.

### **The start of a second quarter century**

The Colloquium series is alive and well. Its founding convener, Young-Key Kim-Renaud, retired from the University more than two years ago, and today its principal co-convener is Jisoo Kim, Korea Foundation Associate Professor of Korean History and Director of GW's recently established Institute for Korean Studies.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The HMS Colloquium in the Korean Humanities and the Institute for Korean Studies at GW are natural collaborators. It is significant, however, that the Colloquium is an initiative firmly grounded in the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures in the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences.

This year will mark the 100th anniversary of Hahn Moo-Sook's birth. On November 9 and 10, GW will be holding the 26th HMS Colloquium to commemorate her centennial, making this program one of the longest-lasting academic outreach projects at GW and in fact anywhere in the world.

### **Tangible and intangible results**

The colloquium is extremely popular in Washington. In addition, it has gained a national and international reputation as a significant forum to promote a better understanding of modern Korean society in the Washington, DC area and beyond. We have published an influential book, *Creative Women of Korea: The Fifteenth through the Twentieth Centuries* (ed. by Young-Key Kim-Renaud, Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), and monographs resulting from the papers presented at the Colloquium. Another major volume is planned with the papers to be presented at the 26th Colloquium. For the basic list of the 26 topics that have been covered so far by the HMS Colloquium in the Korean Humanities at GW (1995-2018), see Appendix 1.

### **The colloquium's namesake: Who was Hahn Moo-Sook?**

At this point, a few words on Hahn Moo-Sook, who happens to be my mother, are in order. For this purpose, let me borrow from the foreword I wrote for the Polish translation of her major 1986 novel called *Mannam* (Encounter). *Mannam* was translated into Polish as *Poszukujac Boga* by Halina Ogarek-Czoj and published by Nobilitas Publishing in Warsaw, Poland in October 1997.

*Hahn Moo-Sook, as I remember her, sought truth, goodness and beauty throughout her life. She celebrated life and human beings even with the full awareness of their weaknesses. Her painter's eye captured the beauty in the visible and the invisible. Forever curious about new things and ideas, she deeply believed that encounters are good and enrich our lives. She practiced this belief by welcoming into her home people from all walks of life and from every corner of the world.*

*Her life in fact is a story of encounters. Hahn Moo-Sook was born into a progressive yet very traditional old Korean family. She had a strict early education which emphasized propriety and knowledge of the Chinese and Korean classics. Growing up, she was the only Korean student in a school intended for the offspring of the Japanese colonialists. Through translated works, she came to meet the West, a source of endless wonder to her. Unusually for her time and circumstances, she also took special lessons in Western-style painting to develop a talent that she*

*revealed at the age of seven, as her painting was selected for a World Children's Art Show held in Berlin.*

*Ironically, it was not her meeting with the West but her arranged marriage into an archconservative Korean family that shocked her the most. She often said that when she was reaching complete despair at that time, it was the life within her womb that saved her. That's how I, the first of her five children, contributed to modern Korean literature! What really made her marvel, however, was her discovery that the differences between her own and her husband's families were only superficial. The two families shared the same deep-rooted cultural values, as they belonged to the same social class. Her Korean sense of identity, that had become very faint after years of Japanese schooling, suddenly solidified. Silently, but forcefully, she said to herself, "I want to write!"*

*For the Polish translation, I could echo what Professor Don Baker said in his foreword to the English translation of the novel: "Encounter is the story of what happened after Roman Catholicism was smuggled onto the Korean peninsula two centuries ago and the impact that imported religion had on the people who encountered it, the persecutions and the piety it aroused. It is the story of an encounter between a scholar of Confucianism and the God of Christianity, and between Tasan's personal moral integrity and his pragmatic survival instincts. It is the story of an encounter between the beliefs and the believers of different faiths—Buddhist, shamanistic, Confucian, and Catholic. It is the story of an encounter between two cultures, two competing worldviews, one Eastern and one Western. It is also, in its literary form, an encounter between contemporary Korea and its past and, in this English translation, an encounter between Western readers and the spirits, beliefs, values, rituals, and history of the Korean people."*

English translations of Hahn Moo-Sook's works, although they are fictions, have been published by major university presses, precisely because they could be used as reference books not only in literature classes but also in other courses such as the ones on Korean history, culture, religion, and women's studies.

Hahn Moo-Sook's house was brimming with visitors of all kinds, and most notably with aspiring artists and writers as well as bright students from the nearby College of Arts and Science of the Seoul National University. She and every member of her family welcomed all who came, and quickly became friends

with them. Hahn Moo-Sook loved reading about and meeting people from very different backgrounds, saying that learning about and from others gives the best opportunity for self-discovery. It is this very belief that made me want to initiate this colloquium series. As a professor in an American university, I thought this was an excellent way for my students, colleagues, and friends to learn about an important part of the great East Asian culture and civilization. Even more importantly, by doing so, we could encourage their curiosity, creative thinking, and help them develop empathy for fellow human beings, however different their background and current outlook on the world may be.

In retrospect, the impact of the Colloquium upon the intellectual community of the greater Washington area and beyond has not been insignificant, especially with Korea's ever-growing presence on the international arena. Over the course of a quarter of a century, we have covered a wide variety of topics of current interest, always from humanities points of view. Korea's miraculously fast recovery from colonization and wars and its achievements in economic and political development have "validated" the Koreans cultural heritage, both visible and invisible, and their participation in world civilization, as well. Through investigations and discussions of various aspects of Korean life and thinking, Korea has become a more familiar society to our audience, especially to those regular colloquium participants who have attended it year after year. This has been our important mission, and we hope to inspire similar programs on other cultures.

### **Flexibility and change: gradual evolving of the HMS Colloquium**

Today, we are no longer concerned about putting Korea on the map, although improving knowledge of Korean culture will be our continuing goal in view of the fact that even among highly educated Americans misperceptions and misunderstandings of today's Korea and modern Koreans abound. For instance, it is astounding to find educated Americans who believe that Korea still receives foreign aid and do not know that South Korea itself has been a donor nation for more than three decades (<https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/south-korean-foreign-aid-contributing-to-international-security/>).

Korea has changed and the world is also very different today. So, our annual topics have gradually become less concerned with overviews and broad introductions. Over time annual colloquia have become academically more refined, creative, and thought-provoking. For example, the most recent HMS Colloquium has examined the various ways the Tale of Ch'unhyang, which is one of the most famous classic works from the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910), has been reflecting not only on social changes in Korea proper, but also the interest of different performing artists and their audiences in North and South

Korea and in Western countries. Scholars presented their research on how the work was translated in different languages and how the tale has been recreated in other genres such as *P'ansori*, theatre, and film.

### **Intercultural ignorance: a factor as critical as ever**

The need for a better cultural understanding of other societies remains as urgent as ever for every society, and particularly the US. This need is one of the likely reasons why the Hahn Moo-Sook colloquium with its focus on the humanities and its concern for deeper cultural understanding has remained welcomed over the years. Genuine cultural understanding of others is critical to the avoidance of conflicts and to their eventual resolution. The need for the continuing presence of the humanities and for venues for on-going dialogs such as the Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium can be brought home in most unexpected and powerful ways.

Three weeks ago an FT article reviewed a new book by Harlan Ullman with the startling title of *Anatomy of Failure: Why America loses every war it starts*. Ullman is a former navy officer and a respected military strategist who taught at the U.S. Naval War College in the 1990s and coined the strategy of “shock and awe” for the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq. Ullman gives three main explanations for the dismal record of U.S. military interventions. “Ullman’s third explanation — that American forces lack cultural knowledge of the enemy — is where he is most scathing.”<sup>2</sup>

Prior to the U.S. presidential election of 2016, Kevin Rudd, a former prime minister of Australia who is fluent in Chinese wrote a long, in-depth analysis of how to manage peacefully and effectively the interactions between the United States and China.<sup>3</sup> In his analysis, Rudd quotes a Chinese official who wondered wistfully: “Are we condemned to mutually assured misperceptions?” giving a cultural version of the famous cold-war concept of ‘mutually assured destruction’.

The necessity to bridge the gap of miscommunication or no communication between the academic world and society at large is an urgent and most meaningful strategy for world peace. The Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium in the Korean Humanities purports to contribute in a small way to making the life and the world more interesting, peaceful, and dynamic.

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<sup>2</sup> Edward Luce, *Financial Times*, February 26, 2018. <https://www.ft.com/content/b84a6ff8-17e3-11e8-9376-4a6390addb44>

<sup>3</sup> Kevin Rudd, *US-China 21, The Future of U.S.-China Relations under Xi Jinping*, Harvard Kennedy School, Belfer Center, Summary Report, April 3, 2015. <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/summary-report-us-china-21>

## Appendix 1: Twenty-six Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquia

The following digital list of colloquium topics starts with the latest ones. Some titles are abbreviated.

Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium (<https://eall.columbian.gwu.edu/hahn-moo-sook-colloquium>)

- 26th Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium (2018) [forthcoming]: "Emotions, Culture, and Subjectivity in Korea"
- [25th Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium \(2017\): "The Tale of Ch'unhyang Beyond Kora: Translation, Narrative, and Performance"](#)
- [24th Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium \(2016\): "Christianity and Trans-Pacific Connections"](#)
- [23rd Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium \(2015\): "Visualizing Royal Ceremonies: Korean Culture through the Ŭigwe Royal Documents of Chosŏn Dynasty."](#)
- [22nd Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium \(2014\): "Language, Power, and Ideology in the Koreas: Honorifics and Politeness"](#)
- [21st Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium \(2013\): "Korea and Cultural Diplomacy: Politics and Meaning in Arts, Industry, and Civil Society"](#)
- [20th Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium \(2012\): "Generations: 100 Years of Korean Literature" \[Poster\] \[Program\] \[English and Korean press release\]](#)
- [19th Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium \(2011\): "Staging Korea: Korean Theatre in Search of New Aesthetics" \[Poster\] \[Program\] \[English and Korean press release\]](#)
- [18th Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium \(2010\): "Medicine, Mental Health and Childhood in Korea" \[Poster\] \[Program\] \[English and Korean press release\]](#)
- [17th Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium \(2009\): "Representing Korea's Visual Culture and Heritage"](#)
- [16th Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium \(2008\): "Tradition and Modernity in Korean Literature"](#)
- [15th Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium \(2007\): "Korean Architecture"](#)
- [14th Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium \(2007\): "Korean Poetry"](#)
- [13th Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium \(2006\): "Korean Food"](#)
- [12th Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium \(2005\): "Military"](#)
- [11th Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium \(2004\): "Education" \(Proceedings\)](#)
- [10th Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium \(2003\): "Korean American Writers" \(Sigur Center Asia Papers 20\)](#)
- [9th Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium \(2002\): "Cinema"](#)
- [8th Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium \(2001\): "Music"](#)
- [7th Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium \(2000\): "Christianity"](#)
- [6th Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium \(1999\): "Translation" \(Review\)](#)
- [5th Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium \(1998\): "Creative Women"](#)
- [4th Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium \(1997\): "Writing and Reconciliation"](#)
- [3rd Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium \(1996\): "Shamanism in a Confucian Society: Past and Present"](#)
- [2nd Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium \(1996\): "Views of Enlightenment and Monastic Practice in Korean Son \(Ch'an/Zen\) Buddhism"](#)
- [1st Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium \(1995\): "Psyche and Cosmos in Traditional Korean Thought"](#)