

Editor's note

Changes in the Korean society in the past 100 years

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This special issue of the Bulletin of Transilvania University contains the papers presented at the workshop dedicated to the changes in the Korean society in the past 100 years, an event which was part of a large-scale project with the same title. From among the Asian countries, South Korea has astonished the whole planet with its radical transformation from 'rags to riches' in a very short time span. While at the beginning of the 20th century, Korea was mainly an agricultural nation, towards the end of the century it became a "highly industrial society" (de Mente 2017, 549). In between these temporal points, there was a full spectrum of events that shaped the Korean society, as we know it today: the loss of its century-long independence to the Japanese, who colonized Korea until 1945; the division of the country following the Korean War (1950-1953) and the dislocation of thousands of people, whose families were separated by the 38th parallel; the rapid industrialization starting with the 1960s; military coups and students' rebellions, the most memorable of them being the one in Kwangju in 1980. All these historical events brought with them changes in the Korean society, which the participants in the above-mentioned workshop tried to capture.

The papers in the current issue of the publication are organized under two headings, *language studies* and *cultural studies*, in the alphabetical order of the authors' surnames.

The *language studies* section begins with **Alexandra Bîja's** article which tackles the problems posed by the translation of *manhwa*, a typical Korean style of comic books accompanied by graphic representations. The term *manhwa* entered the Korean vocabulary in the 1920s, when the country was under Japanese occupation and it borrowed many cultural and linguistic elements from its colonizers. Thus, *manhwa* was used to refer to cartoons, known in Japanese as *manga*. The author points out the difficulty encountered by translators in finding

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equivalents in the target language (English) for some of the terms encountered in these graphic novels. In such problematic situations, the translator does not only have to be in good command of both the source and the target languages, but needs to have a certain cultural understanding of the text.

A better understanding of the Korean spirit requires approaching not only elements pertaining to South Korea, but also those of its northern sister. The Korean War ended with the division of the country, previously known under the name of the Joseon Kingdom, into South (democratic and capitalist) Korea and North (communist) Korea, the demarcation line between the two being the 38th parallel. **Dong Hun Kwak**'s paper emphasizes the idea that students enrolled in the programs of Korean Studies in Romanian and other European universities should also become familiar with aspects of North Korea, despite the difficulty in obtaining information about this country, given its political regime. In this respect, visiting Korean professors have a major role, as they may have easier access to information about their northern brothers. They also militate for a more encompassing study of Korea, which should include both the study of the Korean language and also of the history and culture of the entire peninsula, not only of the southern part.

A phenomenon that brought with it changes in the entire world, South Korea included, is the sars-cov-2 pandemic, which started at the end of 2019. Many educational institutions had to adapt to the new situation, transferring the educational process online. Despite the fact that some of the professors find fault with the online learning because of their lack of skills for conducting online classes or because of a sense of isolation experienced by students, who were used to learning in the company of their peers, **Vivian Lee** demonstrates in her paper that there are also advantages to it. Thus, the online, multimodal English language classroom she created for her Korean undergraduate students on the Zoom platform provided them with the possibility of actively participating in discussions with their teacher and their group mates and, at the same time, helped them in becoming more aware of their linguistic progress.

The first paper in the *cultural studies* section of the volume, authored by **Elena Buja**, tried to capture the way in which the occupational roles of the Korean women have changed in the past 100 years, pointing out that these changes were triggered by a number of factors that affected the Korean society as a whole, such as the spread of Christianity, which gave women the opportunity to leave their houses without being accompanied by a male figure, as was customary at the beginning of the 20th century, the Japanese colonization of the peninsula (1910-1945), which established institutional education, encouraging young Korean women to study and aspire to occupations that were preponderantly performed by men, the massive industrialization of the country following the Korean War (1950-1953) that required

a large working force that included women, as well as the more recent globalization phenomenon which brought with it a higher degree of egalitarianism for the Korean women. Thus, if at the beginning of the 20th century women would perform traditional occupations like farmers, matchmakers, shamans, midwives, or *haenyeo* (sea divers), a century later we find them employed in almost all professions, even in those that were traditionally held by men, where they continue to be discriminated against in terms of salaries and promotion opportunities.

Besides the Covid-19 pandemic, another world-wide phenomenon is migration, which for the Korean people started in 1903, when many became laborers on sugar plantations in Hawaii, and continues in our days, “each wave of Korean migration [being] shaped by different historical factors, and the motivations and characteristics of Korean migrants in each period [being] substantially different” (Kim 2017, 18-19). In most of the cases, the Korean migrants chose industrialized Western countries, where they hoped to enjoy a better life, but some of them seem to have preferred Romania as their new home, as a result of existence of an open market economy. **Valentina Marinescu’s** article deals with the small Korean diaspora in Romania and its members’ attitudes towards the Romanian people, the Romanian society, in general, and economy. At the same time, the scholar also aimed to find out what “lessons” the Romanians could learn from the people in the peninsular country. The findings of her research, which was based on interviews with 7 native Koreans living in Romania, indicate that the Korean migrants’ impression about our country is a balanced one, in the sense that they identified both positive and also some negative characteristics. In what concerns the lesson the Koreans could teach their Romanian peers, this is related to *respect* for the elderly people, which in their culture is promoted by Confucianism and is extremely important.

Also related to people’s adaptation to a new way of life in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic is **Virgine (Borges de Castilho) Sacoman’s** contribution to this issue of the journal. The Brazilian scholar investigated an important aspect of K-pop fandom, namely cyberactivism as a form of resistance. Her focus was on the way the K-pop groups and their fans all over the world used the social media (Internet, Twitter, Instagram) in the past year in order to support humanitarian causes (the Korean ‘comfort women’), environmental causes or to fight racism, by joining the movement *#BlackLivesMatter*, which was triggered in America in 2020 by the death of George Floyd, an Afro-American young man, whose life was cut short by a white police officer. In Sacoman’s opinion, the strong participation of the Brazilian K-poppers in cyberactivism is motivated by the political context of the country, many of these fans using the social platforms to oppose fascism in Brazil.

Marian Suciu's article continues Buja's comparison between tradition and modernization in a time span of a century, focussing on the Korean artistic domain known as *hallyu* ("Korean Wave"). *Hallyu* was used as "soft power" and helped Korea "make its power seem legitimate in the eyes of others" (Nye 1990, 167) at a time when the country was confronted with extreme poverty. The author of the paper investigates two cinematic productions which are part of the Korean Wave (*Seopyeonje*, produced in 1993 and *Love, Lies*, a 2016 production) and captures in them two trends related to Korean music: on the one hand, there is the tendency of Koreans to preserve tradition in its pure form, even at the cost of sacrificing the artists' success or even lives; on the other hand, we witness the process of hybridization, which involves an adaptation of traditional music to modern influences, for the sake of attracting a larger audience.

We are aware that the papers contained in this issue represent only a few pieces in the puzzle covering the transformations that took place in the Korean society in the past 100 years, just as we are aware that other changes are going to happen in this peninsular country, given the socio-political and economic context of the 21st century. As Cumings nicely puts it:

Korea began the twentieth century near the bottom of [the modern] scale and begins the twenty-first near the top. Along the way there have been many gains and many losses, and a remarkable story of human triumph over adversity. But we now have a modern Korea. (Cumings 2005, 15)

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