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The Northern Region of Korea: History, Identity, and Culture
edited by Sun Joo Kim (review)

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(Review)

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in the Hungarian files were lost in the re-translation process, as the Korean words replacing them are identical only in meaning but not in form (see, among others, *Chosŏn Nodongdang*, p. 45; *Hamgyŏng-namdo*, p. 285; *Hamgyŏng-pukto*, pp. 264, 276; *sadaejuii*, p. 125; and *suryŏng*, p. 256).

Nevertheless, these occasional deficiencies, caused as they were by the author's limited training in the field of historical studies, only slightly affect the scholarly value of Kim Poguk's catalog. Due to its nature, it is not particularly useful for classroom discussion, but for scholars interested in doing archival research on post-1945 Korean history it can serve as an invaluable research guide, provided that they manage to overcome the obstacles related to the copying and translation of the selected Hungarian documents.

NOTES

1. Charles Armstrong, "The View on Pyongyang," *St. Petersburg Times*, May 5, 2006.
2. These are MOL codes for administrative (XIX-J-1-k) and confidential (XIX-J-1-j) documents. No page numbers are applicable.

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The Northern Region of Korea: History, Identity, and Culture edited
by Sun Joo Kim. Seattle: Center for Korea Studies, University of
Washington, 2010. 397 pp. 3 illustrations. 4 maps. \$45.00 (paper)

The Northern Region of Korea: History, Identity, and Culture is the fruit of a long-term endeavor by its editor, Sun Joo Kim, an expert in regional history and the history of marginalized people. The result of two intensive workshops and an international conference, this volume takes an interdisciplinary approach to the historical evolution of Korea's northern provinces (Hamgyŏng, Hwanghae, and P'yŏngan) from the early Chosŏn Dynasty (1392–1910) to the liberation era that began in 1945—a subject that has, to date, been the focus of relatively little academic interest due to various limitations on conducting research in the area. The purpose of this volume is eloquently articulated in Kim's valuable introduction. Departing from the conventional methodology of a nation-centered framework as well as from that of micro-history, Kim calls for regional history as an alternative approach that challenges the grand discourse of the nation, which has not only muted the writing of Korean history as a single narrative but marginalized the northern region and its subjectivities in the historiography of Korea.

The northern region, while suffering from political marginalization, continued to transform and shape its own distinctive identity during the Chosŏn Dynasty and played a vital role in working with “global historical forces on the Korean peninsula” (p. 7) during Korea’s turbulent modern era. Kim draws attention to the significance of regionalism as a crucial factor in the historical transformation of the northern region: in its relation to the political center, to outsiders, and also within itself. The strength of this book, therefore, lies in its collective scholarly investigation, from various angles, of both Korea’s northern region and the “silence about the historical depth of its regional identity in Korean history” (p. 3). While the eleven chapters are connected to the larger theme of this volume—the development of the regional alienation of the northern provinces—each essay also presents a meticulous study based on rich primary sources that often complicate the notion of regional discrimination.

The volume begins with the porous nature of the northern region as the territorial border of the peninsula. Kenneth Robinson elucidates the Chosŏn state’s flexible policies toward Jurchen communities in Hamgyŏng Province, which often blurred the political and cultural characteristics of the frontier zone and rendered histories of the peninsular northeast separate from those of other regions in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Kwon Naehyun’s study focuses on the evolution of P’yŏngan Province in the late Chosŏn period, when the economic impact of Chosŏn-Qing relations ironically resulted in both the cultural flourishing of the region and political frustration over the Chosŏn government.

The next two chapters consider the distinct image of the northern region as reflected in a variety of literary sources in the late Chosŏn. While Jang Yoo-seung’s study, though sharing the sense of the same regional identity, emphasizes the diversity embedded in the histories and cultures of the Hamgyŏng and P’yŏngan regions, Jung Min examines how northerners were depicted and characterized by literati outside the north. The following chapters, by Paek Doo-hyeon and Ross King, discuss the linguistic uniqueness of the P’yŏngan dialect and its intimate relationship with the formation of regional identity. Paek’s analysis of the failure to adopt the t-palatalization process in the P’yŏngan dialect shows that the development of a dialect-based linguistic identity stemmed from a strong consciousness of cultural advancement in the region. King’s study describes the spelling debates of the 1930s, in which P’yŏngan Protestants opposed to *han’gŭl* unified orthography by employing the notion of “language ideology.”

Shifting from territorial, cultural, and linguistic characteristics that have marked the northern region’s distinct identity, the next three chapters concern the issue of historically peripheral northerners being receptive to the influx of new Western ideologies at the turn of the twentieth century. Yumi Moon’s study sheds important light on the politically reoriented and resettled popular northern movements during the tumultuous years of 1896–1904, through their increasing interaction with outside forces and ideas, while they simultaneously distanced themselves from the central monarchy. Bruce Fulton analyzes the six stories set

in P'yŏngan Province by the prominent modern writer Hwang Sunwŏn (1915–2000), who was himself a native of P'yŏngan and the descendant of a Neo-Confucian, Christian, and patriotic family. Fulton argues that despite Hwang being known as a politically and socially detached writer, his work reveals subversive and resistant tendencies that, in fact, manifest his consciousness about the unique cultural identity constructed in the P'yŏngan region. Donald Clark's chapter highlights the powerful presence of missionaries in northern Korea before 1945 and demonstrates how regionalism played an unexpected role in the reception and expansion of Christianity in modern Korea.

If all these chapters, to some degree, engage with the northern region's identity, contrasting the views of insiders (northerners) with those of outsiders (non-northerners), the final two chapters offer rare observations of northern Korea by foreigners. Building on the notion of a "contact zone" (p. 255), German Kim and Ross King explore how Russian authors portrayed northern Korea and its inhabitants in their travel narratives from the 1860s to 1913, while nevertheless remaining conditioned by their own perception of cultural stereotypes. And Mark Caprio's chapter illuminates images of the north created and developed by the Japanese throughout the colonial period, along with shifting Japanese imperial policies in response to critical wartime needs in the north after 1931.

One quibble may be the lack in this volume of a juxtaposition that would organically connect its eleven diverse essays, although this is covered to some extent in the introduction, which places the chapters in an overall context. As one of the few English-language studies that takes a regional approach to the field of Korean studies, however, *The Northern Region of Korea* is an outstanding contribution that enriches our understanding of the northern region's vital role in Korea's transition to modern society—a text that also makes its mark on the study of regionalism in general.

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