

**Strange Korean Parallels: an international conference
for comparative approaches to the history and archaeology of Korea
and Northeast Asia with other global regions**

10 – 11 January 2019
University of Helsinki, Finland
A call for bold papers

Background

As fellow Koreanists, when taking an interest in - or otherwise confronted with - any non-Korea related topic, we likely share the same uncontrollable impulse to raise Korea as analogy or contrasting case. Reading histories of other nations or topical areas, we often either encounter a comforting familiarity due to the power of analogy, or find ourselves in minor shock that history contains alternative contingencies. Such reactions can extend beyond narrative content to methodologies and historiography, where we start to wonder or imagine what the Korean equivalent of a given study or methodology might yield.

This conference is open to a range of approaches, but to begin we pose the question: What if Lieberman had included Korea within his seminal two volume study, *Strange Parallels* (2003, 2009)? What was Korea's charter polity? Does the peninsula fall within 'protected' or 'exposed' zones?

The late 2000s also saw the Stanford Ancient Chinese and Mediterranean Empires Comparative History Project, culminating in two edited volumes. These principally dealt with topics of the metropolises and interiors, but what of frontier zones? Namely, how did the experience of Liaodong and northern Korea under nominal Chinese commandery rule compare to the near concomitant period of Romano-Britain?

More immediately, Korea and Vietnam have been treated as *longe durée* comparative subjects by a consortium of universities, with key articles – some again referencing Lieberman – recently published in IAS's (International Institute for Asian Studies, Leiden) *The Newsletter* (No.79 Spring 2018). Korean historiography, meanwhile, has been afforded comparative potential through incisive chapters included in four of the five volumes of *The Oxford History of Historical Writing* (2011).

Over the past decade, the number of high quality monographs on various periods and subjects of Korean history has greatly increased. Aside from reading them, what more can be done with a stimulating book or data set? Comparisons can provide a next stage, wherein the insights obtained from Korean historical contexts are utilized to inform wider discussions of global history, while the arguments based on deep, Korea specific research might be calibrated, refined or challenged in light of new analogies. Broader arguments for comparison as a tool in area studies are found in a recent article by Michael Herzfeld, juxtaposing more contemporary historical circumstances of Thailand and Greece (*The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol.76, No.4. 2017).

Call and conference details

We thus invite historians and archaeologists of all periods of Korea to experiment with possible comparisons and contrasts they have perhaps often thought of but rarely felt license to explore further. Strange Korean Parallels is open to proposals pertaining to all areas of Korea's past that contain a comparative approach with other global regions or localities. Broad areas include, but are not limited to: pre- and early history, micro and macro histories, social history, intellectual history, environmental history, historiography, popular and pseudo history, and finally digital humanities methodologies.

We further invite comparative historians and specialists of other regions with an interest in treating Korea and pursuing collaborative research. The conference is open to doctoral students and above. Both individual and panel proposals are welcome.

The primary aims of this first conference are to establish the foundations for comparative approaches to Korean history, to demonstrate the potential of such research, and to develop a shared research identity among scholars. In particular this conference seeks to bridge East–West divides, and welcomes scholars from Korea and all other countries and continents, to ensure a diverse representation from the outset of this project.

Rather than panels of single speakers, the structure of the conference will be based around panels of working group discussions. For this to be productive, selected participants are asked to commit to submitting a working paper, and will be encouraged to begin dialogue with fellow panelists in advance.

During the conference we will also discuss publication strategies and we welcome early expressions of interest from journals or publishers.

Financially, we aim to provide selected participants with 3 nights accommodation in Helsinki including breakfast (9-12 January), 2 lunches and 2 dinners across the conference days. Participants are responsible for their own travel arrangements.

Please send abstracts (500-600 words) as Word files to: andrew.logie@helsinki.fi with the subject “SKP abstract [SURNAME Name]”.

Abstracts should include your name, position and affiliation.

You should receive confirmation of receipt within five working days.

The working language of the conference is English. Bilingual Korean and English language abstracts will also be accepted.

For further updates, look for the *Strange Korean Parallels* page ([#StrangeKoreanParallels](https://www.facebook.com/StrangeKoreanParallels)) on Facebook.

Important dates:

2018.9.30	Deadline for paper proposals (500-600 words).
2018.10.10	Notification of acceptance/rejection.
2018.10.20	Deadline for confirmation of participation.
2018.12.20	Submission of working drafts papers.
2019.1.10	Conference Day 1
2019.1.11	Conference Day 2

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