

Contemporary Issues

The Korea Society engages American and Korean policy makers, business leaders, scholars, journalists, authors and the interested public in timely, informative and stimulating discussions of contemporary issues which open paths of inquiry, identify areas of common interest and promote more enlightened relations between the United States and Korea.

Chuch'e Tower in
Pyongyang, North
Korea, April 2002
*(photo courtesy of Julie
Chung)*

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

KOREA: POLITICS, ECONOMICS AND SECURITY

January 25 • New York, NY

The Korea Society and the Asia Society jointly hosted an “afternoon tea” with ROK presidential candidate, Lee Hoi Chang, president of the Grand National Party. After being introduced by Donald P. Gregg, Lee made a brief opening statement in which he summarized the main points of a well-publicized speech that he had delivered in Washington during a luncheon jointly hosted by the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute.

In his statement, Lee expressed support for a policy of continued engagement with North Korea, stating that there is “no viable alternative” since the problems posed by North Korea are “too serious to be dealt with through policies of isolation, or containment, or simply what some call ‘benign neglect.’” On the other hand, Lee criticized President Kim’s sunshine policy for its lack of emphasis on reciprocity and presented an outline for an alternative policy. This alternative policy would promote peace and stability by inducing North Korea to open up in a way that would improve its economy and impel it to become a responsible member of the international community. The policy would also require more



(l-r): Lee Hoi Chang, Robert Radke, Donald P. Gregg

explicit reciprocity in the relationship; would not run counter to domestic public opinion; would safeguard fundamental values such as human rights, democracy and the free market; and would be underpinned by a strong national defense.

TRADITION AND MODERNITY IN KOREAN ARCHITECTURE

January 30 • New York, NY

Ms. Juhee Lee-Hartford, an architect with the firm of Hardy Holzman

Pfeiffer Associates explored the interaction between tradition and modernity in contemporary Korean architectural forms during an evening forum. Lee-Hartford, who recently completed a research project in Korea as a Fulbright scholar, characterized contemporary Korean architecture as highly eclectic and noted that the designs draw inspiration from the environment as well as from traditional and modern architectural elements of both the East and the West. She attributed this eclecticism to a con-



Juhee Lee-Hartford

flicted identity—a cultural “identity crisis”—caused by the simultaneous efforts by Koreans to mend the “broken world” left behind after the Korean war while striving to move forward into a new era of modernity.

In her description of traditional Korean domestic architecture, Lee-Hartford noted that traditional elements generally reflect Confucian values and particularly the practice of gender segregation. She argued that the commitment to the con-

cept of a balance of power between the sexes in traditional Korea was translated architecturally into the construction of separate living spaces for males and females, at least among social elites. By providing separate quarters for men and women, the layout of a traditional house concretely expressed the differences in their conventional social roles. For example, men’s quarters were located in the outermost part of the house, reflecting the fact that men were responsible for all dealings with the outside world. On the other hand, women’s quarters were located in the more secluded inner part of the house to reflect their homebound domestic responsibilities. However, she contended that the tension between the sexes led to the construction of “secret” passageways between these male and female spaces. Alluding to another distinctive feature of traditional Korean architecture, Lee-Hartford also argued that houses were designed to strike a balance between the opposing polarities of man-made structures and the natural environment. To

illustrate her arguments, she showed slides of several houses located in Yangdong folk village, a historical preservation area where the architectural aesthetic of the 1400s—when the village was at his apogee—has remained largely intact to this day.

Turning to the impact of modernity, Lee-Hartford described her study of modern homes in Ilsan, a new urban area near Seoul. She explained that these homes were built in response to a special government initiative, an open invitation to architects and builders to create the ideal modern Korean home. This initiative was launched in response to the widespread criticism that the architecture of newly developed urban areas like Ilsan was often uniform and unattractive. Her slides document a veritable cacophony of different styles, as each architect or builder offered a different interpretation of the ideal home. Lee-Hartford concluded her presentation by examining those aspects of these modern homes that draw on traditional architectural themes.

Modern Korean houses in South Korea (photos courtesy of Juhee Lee-Hartford)



THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF SHAMANS IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

February 12 • New York, NY

In a lecture at the Japan Society, cosponsored by The Korea Society, Dr. Laurel Kendall, curator of Asian Ethnographic Collections at the American Museum of Natural History, described the evolution of political and cultural perceptions of Korean shamans over the last century. Her lecture traced the development of the term *misin* and its implications in modern and Confucian times.

For most of this period, shamanic practices were viewed as *misin*, a derogatory term (literally, “deluded” or “false” belief) that was introduced from Japan to Korea at the end of the 19th century. Kendall was careful to distinguish between this modern view,



Laurel Kendall

which denies the existence of spirits and claims that gods and ancestors have no effect on human fortune, and the earlier Confucian view, which disdained shamans as practitioners of unclean and improper rituals and

potential charlatans. Once introduced, *misin* was applied to shamanic practices by many of those with modern educations who were anxious to distinguish themselves from a "backward" rural populace and native traditions. These modernizers felt that shamanic practices inhibited the development of a modern, scientific society. Until the 1970s, the government sporadically acted on this perception, both by actively discouraging shamanic practices and through "anti-superstition" campaigns.

However, rapid industrialization and urbanization together with a massive influx of Western culture created a growing nostalgia for shamans and their rituals, which came to be seen as imperfect "survivals" of enduring national traditions. The origin of this

interpretation dates back to the 1920s, when Ch'oe Namson linked contemporary shaman practices to the myths of Tan'gun, precipitating an intellectual tradition that regards "shamanism" as a unique spiritual force infusing the Korean people. But this view did not fully blossom until the 1980s, when the government began to designate shamanic rituals as Intangible Cultural Treasures and a broad-based popular culture popularized *kut* and other practices, often transforming them into public performances. Kendall concluded by noting that there is a new tension between the rise of popular interest in shamanic practices as performance and the desire of shamans to define their practices as a religion.

KIM JONG IL'S PERSPECTIVES ON THE KOREAN QUESTION

March 27 • New York, NY

The Korea Society broke new ground by hosting a presentation by Dr. Kim Myong Chol, the executive director of the Tokyo-based Center for Korean-American Peace. Kim, often described as an unofficial spokesperson for the government in P'yongyang, asked his listeners to become vicarious North Koreans as he spoke from Chairman Kim Jong Il's perspective on recent events affecting relations between the U.S. and North Korea, as well as those between Seoul and P'yongyang. Kim portrayed Chairman Kim Jong Il as an adroit negotiator who used his adversary's strengths to his own advantage. Kim's talk attracted heavy press coverage, and his comments to the press were very optimistic: he predicted that the U.S. and North Korea would establish full diplomatic relations within a year; that such relations would prevent a war from erupting and that if upcoming North-South talks went well, it was quite possible Chairman Kim would visit Seoul within the year.



Kim Myong Chol

A STRANGE KIND OF LOVE: HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LIKE THE NORTH KOREANS

April 3 • New York, NY

In an off-the-record luncheon forum, Dr. K. A. (Tony) Namkung, independent consultant on U.S.-Asia affairs and

associate director, Program on U.S.-DPRK Relations, UC Berkeley, gave a detailed account of his experiences with North Korean officials and others involved in negotiations with, and analysis of, North Korea. He emphasized that within the constraints of general



K. A. (Tony) Namkung

North Korean policy, North Korean officials were active and creative in seeking ways to resolve issues and they worked hard to keep diplomatic contacts alive even when the diplomatic climate was unfavorable. Furthermore, although negotiations with the North were often protracted and difficult, North Korea was very careful to abide by the letter of its signed agreements.

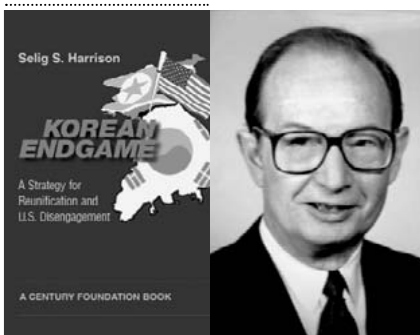
ENDING THE STANDOFF ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA: A DISCUSSION WITH SELIG S. HARRISON

April 30 • New York, NY

Veteran journalist, scholar and North Korea expert, Selig S. Harrison, made two main points about U.S.–North Korea relations during a breakfast forum presentation cosponsored by the Robert F. Wagner School of Public Service of New York University. He warned that the current harsh Bush administration policy could drive North Korea into producing weapons of mass destruction and long-range missiles, and eventually might provoke war. On the other hand, Harrison

argued that it was possible for President Bush to promote peace on the Korean peninsula, but only by phased withdrawal of American troops from South Korea. He also stressed North Korea's fear and mistrust of the U.S. and expressed concern that improved North-South relations might increase the gap between Washington and Seoul. Therefore he urged the U.S. to stop demonizing P'yongyang.

Serving as a discussant, David B.H. Denoon, a professor of politics and economics at New York University, offered a very critical assessment of Harrison's



Selig S. Harrison

new book, *Korean Endgame: A Strategy for Reunification and U.S. Disengagement*. Denoon argued that the tone of the book was too value neutral—ignoring the basically evil nature of the regime as exemplified by the Rangoon bombing and North Korea's starving populace.

Dennis C. Smith, director, Public Policy Specialization, Robert F. Wagner School of Public Service, made welcoming remarks and introduced the presenters. Donald P. Gregg, president & chairman of The Korea Society, served as the moderator.

THE 23RD ANNUAL ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN HERITAGE FESTIVAL

May 5 • New York, NY

The Korea Society was one of many participating groups in the annual APA Heritage Festival presented by the Coalition of Asian Pacific Americans. Over a hundred different organizations were present to increase awareness of Asian Pacific American history and culture. The daylong festival was held at Union Square Park and featured activities and performances for all ages. The Coalition of Asian Pacific American Associations was formed in 1979, shortly after President Jimmy Carter declared the first Asian Pacific American Heritage Week.

BRUCE FULTON READS FROM A READY-MADE LIFE: EARLY MASTERS OF KOREAN FICTION

May 10 • New York, NY

In a VOICES program, Professor Bruce Fulton, discussed the significance of *A Ready-Made Life* and read selections from the volume. The title story for the volume is by Ch'ae man-shik. "The Lady Barber," by Na To-hyang; "Mama and the Broder," by Chu Yo-sop; and Yi Sang's "Phantom Illusion" were also included in the volume. Following his presentation, there was a lively Q&A session, mainly about how the stories

were chosen for the book and the challenges of rendering Korean into English. The late Kim Chong-un, who cotranslated the book with Fulton, assembled most of the stories included in the volume while teaching as a visiting professor at the University of Washington in 1982–83. He was a highly respected professor and former president of Seoul National University. Although a specialist in American lit-



erature, Kim also had a very extensive knowledge of Korean literature.

According to Fulton, early modern writers receive scant attention today even though they laid the foundation for modern Korean fiction. Compressing a couple of centuries of western experience into a few decades, by the

1920s and 30s they had begun to develop a distinct modern literature, among which the short story was perhaps the

strongest genre. However, during the Japanese colonial period, they wrote under severe restrictions and often had to compromise their artistic and nationalistic values in order to survive. Moreover, a number of important authors went north before or during the Korean war and publication of their work was prohibited in the South until the late 1980s. Since organizations were already more interested in promoting living authors, these issues made funding the translation of works by early modern authors even more difficult.

IN THE ABSENCE OF SUN: A READING WITH HELIE LEE

May 15 • New York, NY

Helie Lee presented a VOICES program on her new memoir, *In the Absence of Sun*. Her book describes how she and her father were able to arrange her uncle's escape from North Korea. Following the publication of her first book, *Still Life with Rice*, Lee learned that the lives of her uncle and his family had been endangered because the book had attracted undue attention to them. Her adventure began with a call from a

trader in China who had made contact with her uncle and offered to help her meet him. Although she originally planned only to meet him at the



Helie Lee

Chinese border, she and her father decided to bring her uncle and his family out of North Korea after she discovered the conditions under which they were living. Her account dramatizes the long and difficult process of rescuing her North Korean relatives, as well as her personal struggle in coming to terms with her gender identity.

HOW ECONOMIC DEVASTATION HAS BROUGHT THE MARKET ECONOMY TO THE DPRK

May 22 • New York, NY

In a luncheon forum held at The Korea Society, Hazel Smith, senior fellow at the U.S. Institute for Peace, discussed the socioeconomic changes that have taken place in North Korea over the last decade and suggested that business can facilitate beneficial change there. She focused on the availability of information, changes in the food distribution system, increases in mobility and the "dollarization" of the economy—changes that came about because of the breakup of traditional trading patterns among Communist bloc countries that had favored North Korea, which were compounded by several years of natural disasters. North Korea was unable to find markets for its exports in the new trading environment and, since North Korean agriculture requires extensive





Hazel Smith

Top: Sunday afternoon in the park, P'yongyang, 1998

Below: Preparing for a mass display, outside the May Day stadium, P'yongyang, October 2000

Bottom right: Menu at Wonsan Hotel restaurant, 1999 (photos courtesy of Hazel Smith)



irrigation and heavy inputs of fertilizer, which rely on imports of raw materials, shortages of these began to appear. As a

result, the country became increasingly fragile and vulnerable to natural disasters. When floods destroyed coal mines and large stocks of grain reserves in 1995 and subsequent years, the DPRK had to seek international assistance to alleviate the resulting famine.

The evolution of cooperation between the DPRK and the World Food Programme (WFP), after the WFP was permitted into the country to administer international aid, allowed the gradual assembly of information in such areas as population density by county, food deficits, cereal production and the proportions of working families in counties. Through this process, the WFP proved that it was possible to obtain information on North Korea.

What this information documented was the slow shift of the DPRK economy from a socialist system to one based on food and hard currency. Although food aid from the WFP was channeled through the public distribution system, the aid was primarily used to feed women and children and others most at risk. Food markets developed to supply food to the rest of the

population and, by the winter of 1998–99, the public distribution system no longer functioned as the primary source of food.

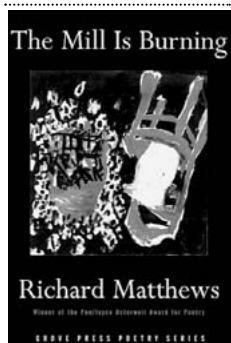
The growth of markets had also been accompanied by the dollarization of the economy and increased mobility. Until 1995, mobility was tightly controlled and the number of vehicles was limited, but the famine set in motion population movements that were difficult to control. By the late 1990s, personal mobility had increased tremendously. Bicycles now are permitted in P'yongyang and the number of cars has increased substantially. In 1998, a foreigner could not give non-DPRK currency to an individual; possession of foreign currency was still illegal. By 2001, all individuals would accept foreign currency, and it was widely used for most transactions. The benefits of this change have been distributed very unevenly. Those with foreign contacts are most advantaged, and P'yongyang, Namp'o and Hyesan residents have benefited disproportionately. The question now is how all of these changes will be consolidated and how the regime will control the new and extreme social cleavages.



THE MILL IS BURNING: POETRY BY RICHARD MATTHEWS

June 14 • New York, NY

During a VOICES program held at The Korea Society, Richard Matthews read from his recently published collection of poetry, *The Mill Is Burning*. Some of the poetry in the collection relates his impressions of Korea, where he taught English for two



years. His work often incorporates Korean poetic forms as well. For example, he appropriates the *sijo*, a three-line lyrical form, while using English words to write about things unrelated to Korea. Both his presentation and his poetry displayed his attraction to, and affection for, Korean culture and literature.



Richard Matthews

KOIZUMI IN NORTH KOREA: IMPLICATIONS FOR ASIA AND U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

September 23 • New York, NY

The historic visit to P'yongyang by Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi was discussed by an expert panel in a program cosponsored with the Japan Society. The presenters were Charles Armstrong, associate professor & director of the Center for Korean Research at Columbia University; Kurt Campbell, senior vice president & director of the International Security Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies; Donald P. Gregg, president & chairman of The Korea Society; and Yutaka Kawashima, senior fellow at the Center for Business and Government at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. The program was introduced and moderated by William Clark, president of the Japan Society. The distinguished guests included Sun Joun-Yung, permanent representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations, and Han Song Ryol, deputy permanent representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the United Nations.

In his remarks, Gregg noted that while the short-term benefits of Koizumi's trip remain unclear due to the public reaction in Japan, the visit holds monumental potential



Top (l-r): Han Song Ryol, Sun Joun-yung, Motomura Yoshiyaki and William Clark

Middle l-r: Charles Armstrong, Kurt Campbell, Donald P. Gregg and Yutaka Kawashima

over the long term as the first step toward reconciliation between Japan and North Korea. Armstrong spoke to the issue of North Korea's motivation for agreeing to the summit meeting with Koizumi. Although economic considerations are always a backdrop for North Korean diplomatic initiatives, he said, they were not the primary impetus for the recent decision to pursue engagement with Japan. In his assessment of the potential implications of the Koizumi visit, Kurt Campbell cautioned against taking an overly rosy view by underscoring the Bush administration's commitment to the concept of "moral clarity" as a restraining factor in consolidating the potential benefits of the visit. In his remarks, Yutaka Kawashima pointed out that Japan-DPRK normalization is equivalent to a war settlement, the last remnant of the post-WW II settlements that Japan is morally obligated to pay. Kawashima stressed that a diplomatic offensive toward North Korea is a novel thing for Japan, and in pursuing this course Japan wants to ensure that any economic aid and compensation provided to North Korea will be conducive to the peace and stability of the Northeast Asian region.

ASSESSING RECENT BREAKTHROUGHS IN RELATIONS WITH THE DPRK: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE KELLY VISIT TO P'YONGYANG

October 16 • New York, NY

In his introduction to a panel at a breakfast forum held at the Citigroup Center, Donald P. Gregg, president & chairman of The Korea Society, stated that he was glad that Kelly had visited P'yongyang as it marked the first formal visit by a U.S. official to P'yongyang during the Bush administration. Although the results of the Kelly visit were unknown, he hoped it would establish a trend toward more contact between the U.S. and the DPRK. He then introduced the panel in order of their presentations: Charles Kartman, executive director of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO); Hongze He, chief correspondent, *People's Daily*; David Denoon, professor of politics and economics at New York University; and David Unger, a member of the *New York Times* editorial board.

Kartmann spoke about the mechanics of preparing for such a visit. The most basic step in preparing for a visit is to gather information from public organs, knowledgeable parties like China, Russia and the ROK as well as the so-called New York channel. Since the DPRK was willing to meet with Washington, we can assume, Kartmann argued, that they did not expect the meeting to end in failure, much less diplomatic disaster. Based on evidence available, the U.S. presentation surprised and unbalanced the DPRK. Put off balance, they replied with a tough public response that they have since sought to retreat from. After recovering from their initial surprise, the DPRK is probably seeking the best way to keep the door open and hoping that the U.S. approach was not a single shot message.

Hongze He said that the DPRK is now in a stronger position than the



(l-r): Hongze He, Charles Kartman and David Unger

U.S. The DPRK has also made major changes and will receive help from China, Russia and the ROK. Therefore, if the Bush administration wants a breakthrough with North Korea, it should work with the North's neighbors and revise its policy.

Denoon gave a broader strategic picture of what is happening in Asia and how that will affect Bush administration policy during the remainder of his term. Because recovery from the 1997 financial crisis has been slower than anticipated, economic growth and recovery are the principal goals of most governments in Northeast and Southeast Asia. For this reason, Denoon said, there was little support for the Bush "axis of evil" terminology in Asia.

Unger suggested that the relationship between the U.S. and the DPRK might be termed "asynchronous engagement," where both sides move on a track they consider engagement, but whose radically different views of the world and levels of power make the process very turbulent. The real story, Unger argued, was that the U.S. has been using a different rhetoric, psychology and policies—backed up by real power—in its relations, not only with the DPRK, but with the rest of the world as well.

Brent Choi, reporter for the *JoongAng Ilbo*, stated that both the

U.S. and the DPRK seem to have had the ROK presidential election in mind when they prepared for the Kelly visit. The DPRK seems to have prepared for talks of the same tenor as their apology to South Korea after the naval clash at the end of June and their efforts to make the Koizumi trip a success. The U.S., on the other hand, did not seem ready for serious negotiations and may have been interested more in tipping the electoral scales toward Lee Hoi-chang.

PURSUIING PEACE ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA FOR FUTURE PROSPERITY

October 17 • New York, NY

At a seminar cosponsored with the Center for Korean Research at Columbia University, Samuel Kim, senior research scholar at the East Asian Institute, Charles Armstrong, associate professor of history, Robert Immerman, associate research scholar at the East Asian Institute, and Jeong-Ho Roh, director of the Korean Law Center, participated in an informal panel about the reported DPRK admission that they have a program to produce highly enriched uranium. Samuel Kim acted as moderator for the panel.

Armstrong began by noting that the uranium enrichment program, the existence of which had become public the previous day, probably violated the spirit of the 1994 Agreed Framework, the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and the 1997 North-South agreement on denuclearization. However, the main issue was not why the DPRK was developing a nuclear capability—DPRK officials had always reserved the right to develop one—but why they chose to admit it to Kelly during his visit to P'yongyang and why the U.S. took two weeks to respond to this admission. On the DPRK side, Armstrong argued, there had been growing frustration about official U.S.



(l-r): Jeong-Ho Roh, Robert Immerman, Samuel Kim and Charles Armstrong

attitudes and policies during the Bush administration and the DPRK had long held that the U.S. had not kept its side of the Agreed Framework. Armstrong argued that factors influencing the North Korean decision included Kelly's total lack of negotiating skill while in P'yongyang and the North Korean realization that no dialogue could go forward in the current environment, justifying a return to a policy of brinksmanship. Armstrong discussed three basic positions that the U.S. might take in response to the DPRK. First they could cut off dialogue and abandon the Agreed Framework, they could order a pre-emptive strike against the reactors or they could negotiate a new agreement for inspection of nuclear sites.

Roh made four points. First, we know very little about the North Korean nuclear program. Second, we need to learn more about precisely what the North Koreans said and the extent of the uranium enrichment program. Next, we needed to know the quality of Kang Sok Ju's admission and the context for his statement. Finally, we needed to know why the DPRK decided to make this admis-

sion at this time. Roh agreed with Armstrong, that the timing was related to the DPRK strategy of brinksmanship and the desire for a new "package deal" for the light water reactors.

Immerman considered the issue from the flip side, trying to assess the opaque nature of the Bush administration. We do not know, he argued, what evidence was presented to the North Koreans as proof the DPRK was enriching uranium. No one knows how the North Koreans responded to this evidence or what their response was the next day. No one knows how this was reported back to Washington and whether the same information was reported to Seoul and Tokyo. Finally, no one knows why the nature of the Kelly visit was withheld for two weeks and only made public yesterday.

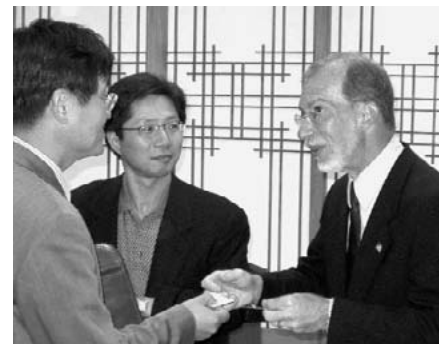
Kim noted that the CIA National Intelligence Estimates of North Korean nuclear capabilities have changed from the Clinton to the Bush administration. During the Clinton administration, the CIA stated that North Korea had enough plutonium to make one or two nuclear bombs.

However, in the December 2001 estimate, the CIA stated that, by the mid 1990s, North Korea had one or two plutonium-based nuclear weapons. The confusion surrounding these differing assessments has created a tremendous ambiguity about the nature of DPRK nuclear capabilities that the North Koreans have capitalized on.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN U.S. RELATIONS WITH THE KOREAN PENINSULA

October 24 • New York, NY

Mr. Evans J. R. Revere, deputy chief of mission at the U.S. embassy in Seoul, spoke "off-the-record" about the state of relations between the U.S. and the



Evans Revere (right) with Joo-hyeon Baik and Young Cho

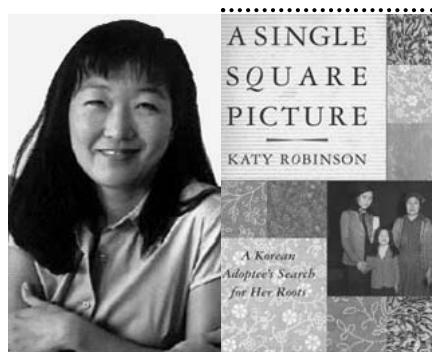
two Koreas in a luncheon forum at The Korea Society. Revere gave an introductory presentation about the background and circumstances leading to Assistant Secretary James Kelly's visit to the DPRK in early October and a summary of the current state of U.S. relations with the two Koreas. He then conducted a lively and informative Q&A session.

A SINGLE SQUARE PICTURE: A KOREAN ADOPTEE'S SEARCH FOR HER ROOTS: A READING WITH KATY ROBINSON

November 11 • New York, NY

The Korea Society joined with the Sejong Cultural Center, Also-Known-As and Columbia University's Asian American Alliance to host a book reading with Ms. Katy Robinson, who discussed the origins and content of her recently published memoir, *A Single Square Picture: A Korean Adoptee's Search for Her Roots*. She and her husband took a one-year leave of absence to live in Korea and immerse themselves in Korean culture. The book relates her experiences in that one year.

Robinson read an excerpt from her book, which recounted her experi-



Katy Robinson

ence at the adoption agency in Seoul when she first discovered her mother's circumstances. Like many other women who give their children to adoption agencies, Robinson's birth mother wanted to protect her daughter from the discrimination that is too often passed to the children of unwed mothers. Although unable to find the whereabouts of her mother, Robinson was able to meet her father, a meeting that inspired her to begin studying Korean.



(l-r): Donald P. Gregg, Lieutenant General Ri Chan Bok, Donald Oberdorfer, DPRK Official Jong Dong Hak, and Frederick F. Carriere in P'yongyang.

REPORT FROM NORTH KOREA

November 13 • Washington, DC

Don Oberdorfer, distinguished journalist-in-residence, Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, and author of *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*, and Donald P. Gregg, president & chairman of The Korea Society, discussed their findings during a recent visit they had made to P'yongyang at the invitation of DPRK Vice Foreign Minister Kim Kye Gwan. The program was held at the Asia Society's Washington Center and cohosted by The Korea Society.

significant change over this seven-month period. In particular, he spoke about the impact of Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly's trip in early October, during which Kelly confronted his North Korean counterparts with evidence that North Korea had a new nuclear program involving enriched uranium. Gregg also underscored the positive significance of Chairman Kim Jong Il's admission to Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi that North Korea had abducted Japanese citizens during the 1970s and 80s for intelligence purposes. In closing, Gregg said he was "waiting for the other shoe to drop" in terms of P'yongyang's response to the recently announced cut-off of future KEDO oil shipments.

**A TALE OF TWO CITIES:
WASHINGTON & P'YONGYANG**

November 21 • New York, NY

Donald P. Gregg, president & chairman of The Korea Society, discussed the state of U.S.-DPRK relations in a session of the Seminar on Contemporary Korean Affairs series of the Center for Korean Research at Columbia University cosponsored by The Korea Society.

Gregg began by offering some impressions from his visits to P'yongyang in April and November, noting that he had observed signs of

**THE NORTH KOREAN REVOLUTION,
1945-1950 WITH DR. CHARLES K.
ARMSTRONG**

December 10 • New York, NY

In an evening forum at The Korea Society, Charles K. Armstrong, associate professor of history and director of the Center for Korean Research at Columbia University, gave a presentation based on his book, *The North*

Korean Revolution, 1945–1950. The presentation also included a clip from the first Korean feature film produced in North Korea, *Naui Kohyang* [My hometown], which was completed in 1949. Armstrong gave an overview of his book, told how he came to write it and what he learned during his research and writing. Armstrong first became interested in the DPRK when he spent a year in northeast China as a graduate student in Chinese history. When he began work on the book about a decade ago, some people advised him against writing it because they were sure that the DPRK would soon collapse as a result of the demise of the Soviet Union and the opening of China. Clearly, the DPRK did not collapse, and one purpose of the book is to show that the durability and longevity of this regime are rooted in the social organization established as the DPRK was coming into being in the late 1940s.

The lack of detailed scholarship on the DPRK is due in part to the tight control that North Korea has over information entering and leaving the country. However, on the advice of his dissertation advisor, Bruce Cummings, Armstrong based his research on a huge store of little-used information about North Korea in the U.S.—material seized during the brief occupation of the DPRK in 1950. Much of the archive was declassified during the 1970s and 1980s but it still had not received extensive scholarly attention. As he explored this vast collection, Armstrong came to the opinion that people were using it to answer the wrong questions, i.e., the same questions that had always been the focus of research on North Korea, such as: Who was Kim Il Sung? Where did he come from? But the sensitive documents that would be needed to answer these



Charles Armstrong



questions would have been too important to leave behind and are not among the documents in the archive. What the archive does contain is an enormous amount of information about other social, political and cultural questions. There is a vast collection of documents by the Korean Workers Party on local government; organizational records; magazines and books of poetry; many volumes of all sorts of propaganda and mass culture; and criminal and court records. In short, the archive seemed to be a useful resource to look at North Korea as it had not been studied before—as a real society full of real people instead of a political system run by a few leaders at the top.

Armstrong's book is historically centered on the proclamation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on September 9, 1948. It explores several questions relating to political parties: the coalitions that formed; writings by Kim Il Sung and other communist and noncommunist political leaders; mass organizations; and especially *sahoe tanch'e*, social organizations, which were enormous and included hundreds of thousands of citizens.