



## Korean Literature and Culture

Jan 29, 2020 (Wednesday) 6-8pm, Wilhelmstraße 133, Room 30

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Migration and 'multiculture' in South Korean literature:  
Real world mirrored in fiction

### Abstract:

Exposing the shameless exploitation of foreign workers and the plight of foreign brides — massive discrimination that looks all the more appalling when contrasted with the immense adoration for white Westerners — *damunhwa munhak* (“multiculture literature”), a genre that developed during the last two decades, can be understood as an attempt by fiction writers to contribute to a better world by inducing readers to feel empathy. Some of these novels have an additional focus: contesting the infamous *danil minjok sinhwa*, the myth of the homogenous nation, by contending that “Everybody is a mixed blood” (according to the protagonist and narrator of Son Hong-kyu’s *The Muslim Butcher*, a novel centered on an orphaned Korean teenager who got adopted by a former Turkish soldier).

Koreanness is usually conceived of as either as a “software” or, alternatively, constructed as a set of skills, beliefs, and habits. However, what the struggling figures in *damunhwa munhak* novels are primarily haunted by is not their falling short in regard to any presumed essence of the *homo coreanicus* but simply their outward appearance. A society wrapped up in surfaces, South Korea proves unforgiving not only for the “underclass” of the unlovely among their compatriots but most of all to those whose appearance marks them as outsiders in the most literal sense.

The presentation will dwell on descriptions of resistance to or subversion of ascribed identity, found both in novels about foreigners in Korea and, as a complementing contrast, in novels about individual Koreans resembling foreigners. All these novels can be read as powerful interventions on public discourse.

**Andreas Schirmer** is assistant professor at Palacký University Olomouc. Holding a PhD in Modern German Literature from the University of Vienna, he has also completed a PhD program in Korean Language and Literature at Seoul National University. He coordinates a network among Korean studies programs in Central and Eastern Europe, overseeing exchange between 15 programs in ten countries, has authored a Korean textbook for German learners, and has translated Korean literature. His current research relates to the literary representation of current issues in contemporary Korean literature, to translation studies, or to historical interaction between Koreans and Europeans.