



Korean Literature and Culture

Jan 15, 2020 (Wednesday) 6-8pm, Wilhelmstraße 133, Room 30

Prof. Barbara Wall (København Universitet, Denmark)

Crossing the Border between Life and Death for Satirical Effects in
the Webtoon *Sin kwa hamkke* (Along with the gods, 2010-2012)

Abstract:

Since at least 2015 South Korean society has been massively criticized, mostly from within, as being “Hell Chosŏn,” where Chosŏn, the name of the last Korean royal dynasty, is used as an equivalent to South Korea. The Naver webtoon *Sin kwa hamkke* by Chu Homin can be understood as a forerunner of the Hell Chosŏn discourse. In the webtoon the readers travel with the protagonist through different kinds of hell, which turn out to be satirical versions of contemporary South Korean society. While the satire in the webtoon has a clearly subversive character and can be understood as social criticism, at the same time the webtoon also has strong nationalistic tendencies. Although the pantheon of hells, as it is portrayed in the webtoon, actually draws from diverse sources of different provenance and is therefore a prime example of intracultural multiculturalism, Chu Homin constructs a culturally homogenous picture of the hellish pantheon, thereby emphasizing its pure Koreanness. This paper explores how different codes are mixed and switched in the webtoon for satirical and nationalistic purposes. This play with different codes demonstrates how nationalistic reductionism tends to obscure intracultural multiculturalism, thereby concealing not only one of the strongest appeals of *Sin kwa hamkke*, but of Korean culture in general.

Barbara Wall is an assistant professor in Korean Studies at the University of Copenhagen. She has a BA in Japanese Studies and Classical Chinese from Heidelberg, an MA in Confucian Studies from Sungkyungwan University and a PhD in Korean Literature from Bochum. Her main research interests are the circulation, translation and adaptation of literary narratives in Korea, Japan and China. At the moment she is working on her first book in which she develops a digital tool to visualize and create story universes like *The Journey to the West*. Her articles have appeared in journals such as *Acta Koreana*, *Journal of Japanese and Korean Cinema*, and *International Journal of Communication*.