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Introduction to the special issue: "Cho Seung-bog (1922-2012): at the Crossroads of Academia and Activism"¹

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This special issue deals with the multifaceted roles of Professor Cho Seung-bog (Cho Sŭngbok 趙承福, 1922-2012), one of the founders of post-war Korean and Japanese studies in Sweden. Concurrently with his academic career, he was active in Korean diaspora socio-political movements, including those advocating peace, democratization and reunification of North and South Korea. This special issue aims to clarify the deep interrelationship between Cho's academic and socio-political commitments. His research in linguistics, his primary discipline, focused on Korean and Japanese sociolinguistics but also included cultural studies. Cho's political views and commitments were inextricable from his academic life and underpinned his close connections with Eastern European colleagues across the dividing lines of the Cold War.

As Bert Edström's contribution to this special issue tells us, Cho was born in northeastern Korea but raised in Manchuria, which became Japan's informal colony in 1931. The colonial circumstances implied a split linguistic identity. Using Korean at home and Chinese on the street, Cho had to do most of his formal schooling in Japanese since 1934, first in Manchuria and later in Japan proper, where he moved in 1939 on a stipend from Manchukuo's puppet "government." As a way of learning about the world outside of the Japanese Empire and preparing for Korea's hoped-for post-colonial future, Cho became immersed in the study of Western philosophy and enrolled in 1942 at the Department of Western Philosophy at Tokyo Imperial University, Japan's most prestigious seat of learning.

His persistent interest in studying English helped him land a job as Japanese-English translator for the US military government in Japan in 1946-8. In 1948, he moved to the United States, where he continued his studies of Western philosophy at Minnesota State University. The catastrophic event for Koreans that the Korean War constituted changed his plans and his life course completely.

Kyounghwa Lim's contribution to this special issue makes clear that Cho, while not precisely a Communist, was a neutralist Korean nationalist with rather strong leftist sympathies. He viewed the Korean War as essentially an internecine conflict and did not consider – and for good reasons – that the South Korean government was genuinely democratic. He opposed the US involvement on the Southern side because it internationalized the conflict and helped to entrench Syngman Rhee's dictatorial regime. In the times of McCarthyism, such views publicly stated could have ruinous consequences, and Cho had to leave the US in late 1951. Members of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and pacifist Quakers helped him to move to Norway. During a visit to Sweden, Cho decided to settle in the university town of Uppsala. His neutralist nationalism was tolerated in neutral Sweden, but, as Bert Edström mentions in his contribution, Swedish police kept a watchful eye on him for years to come.

Cho enrolled at Uppsala University but had to switch his focus from Western philosophy to East Asian linguistics. Subsequently, he did outstanding academic work on Korean, Chinese and Japanese. He also taught these languages at the university from 1957 to 1962. Wonhyong Cho's contribution to this special issue treats the linguistic aspects of Professor Cho's academic career in the 1950-60s, focusing on his Korean language research. Concurrently, he was politically engaged. From 1959 Cho was a Swedish citizen and member of the Social Democratic Party and had leftist sympathies. However, he felt frustrated and alienated by what he saw as an increasingly nationalist dictatorship in North Korea, which deprived its academics of autonomy. His visit to North Korea in 1970 cemented this view. Visiting South Korea in 1969 gave him an impression of a society characterized by pro-American authoritarian rule based on the domination structures inherited from the colonial age, and he concluded that free inquiry or socio-political activism was impossible there.

Cho saw that the structures of Cold War order solidify and perpetuate the militarized authoritarian regimes on both sides of Korea's national division line. Nonetheless, he was optimistic about Korea's potential for liberal and democratic development. Vladimir Tikhonov argues in his contribution that Cho in his overall vision of East Asian culture saw Japan as a country where the emperor system contributed to maintaining the basic patterns of patriarchal, paternalist collectivism and collective irresponsibility. This contrasted in his view to Confucian Korea, which he considered possessed a highly universalist tradition inherently more compatible with universalist doctrines such as emphasis on individuality or human rights. Politically, much of Cho's hopes for democratizing at least South Korea were related to the oppositional movement led by Kim Dae-jung (Kim Tae-jung 1924–2009), perhaps the internationally best-known pro-democracy leader in 1970-80s South Korea. Stockholm University professor since 1975, Cho tirelessly fought for Kim's release following when he had been kidnapped by South Korean agents from his Tokyo hotel room in 1973. Subsequently, Cho was an important driver in the campaign to secure Kim his Nobel Peace Prize, which he received in 2000.

This special issue aims to describe Cho's trajectory as a researcher and activist, outlining both his accomplishments and the inevitable limitations of his achievements. Wonhyong Cho concludes in his contribution that Cho's work on Korean linguistics was trailblazing for its time, but South Korean academia paid little attention to it. Kyoungwha Lim shows that Cho's neutralist nationalism could never become a mainstream ideology in South Korea, locked as it was in a military confrontation with its northern neighbour. The very discourse of Korean reunification, which was central to Cho's political thought and activism, has recently been officially discarded by North Korean authorities and quietly sidelined by increasing numbers of younger South Koreans. Amidst the current flare-up of global geopolitical tensions, the division structures on the Korean Peninsula – which Cho saw as foundational to the survival of authoritarian modes of governance on both sides of the divide – look more solid than ever.

This is precisely the reason why Cho's legacy should be re-examined. He was a tireless fighter against the spirit of the Cold War and did his best to relativise Cold War structures. He attempted to build a global academic community including scholars from Eastern Europe

and, ideally, North Korea. At the same time, he made explicit his democratic vision for Korea and the essential importance of mitigating Cold War confrontations in order to achieve successful democratic development. He was himself a victim of McCarthyism and attentive to human rights violations on *both* sides of the Cold War fronts. His neutralism implied, *inter alia*, the capacity to reflect critically on the actions of his own – that is, Western – side in the Cold War context. In the challenging times of deepening geopolitical confrontations and great power rivalries, the experiences of scholars-cum-activists like Cho are important for realizing pacifist, democratic and universalist ideals. These experiences must be rediscovered and studied in academic, socio-political and ideological contexts.

This special issue is a product of almost two years of work, which started with a panel dealing with Cho Seung-bog at the 31st AKSE conference in Copenhagen, June 22–25, 2023. We want to thank Professor Cho's children Suk-Hi Cho and Frédéric Cho, who kept his archive for years before it was donated to Uppsala University's Library Carolina Rediviva in 2023. Their generous help and assistance were indispensable for this special issue project. This archive proved to be one of the most important sources for the contributors to the present special issue. We also want to extend our sincere gratitude to Dr Robert Winstanley-Chesters, whose engagement and editorial efforts have been vital. Last but not least, we would like to express our gratitude to the International Society for Korean Studies (ISKS). Its grant allowed us to conduct an examination of Cho's archive at Carolina Rediviva as well as a seminar dedicated to the research on Cho's legacy in the end of September 2024. The papers presented at that seminar – in most cases, augmented versions of the 31st AKSE papers – provided the starting point for the contributions in this special issue.

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