Foreword

Covid-19 is still on our minds. While Europe is moving back to an almost normal life, the pandemic has returned to Asia, including countries that proved resilient during the previous waves. This time it is the unfairness in the global distribution of vaccines that stands out. In the rich countries of the global North we are now starting to protect our elderly with vaccine boosters, while in the global South the majority of the population have not received even the first dose. Many countries of East and Southeast Asia are an exception, though, as they benefited from international help in securing a vaccine supply beyond their economic means. Vaccine diplomacy has emerged as a new instrument to consolidate alliances or to forge new relations. At the same time, the way in which governments have responded—or have failed to respond—to the pandemic is having an impact on countries' political equilibrium. The near future will likely see a gradual reversal of the health crisis as vaccines become more easily available and medicines able to counteract the virus are tested. However, the pandemic will have a lasting impact on our countries and will also transform the way in which we conduct research.

The articles published in this issue cover a wide spectrum of topics—as is always the case for open issues. The first article deals with the role of second-wave Korean TV series in opening a space for dialogue on social problems in contemporary Korean society. The second article also deals with representations of society in media—in this case how Japanese society negotiates between private and public space through the analysis of post-war films. The third addresses the growing international projection of China, looking at the Chinese grand strategy in Africa implemented via infrastructural projects. The fourth contains an analysis of the reform of state-owned enterprises in China during the last decade, while the fifth looks at how Beijing is targeting European media and public opinion in an effort to strengthen its international influence. The sixth contribution is a commentary written by North Korean scholars, examining their own country's law on space exploration.

This issue is enriched by three book reviews. We launched book reviews in the previous issue and we will continue with the next volumes. As we anticipated some time ago, from 2022 we will publish three issues per year owing to the growing number of good quality articles we want to publish. Stay tuned!

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