

LETTER

FROM THE EDITOR

As 2017 draws to a close, voices around the world are questioning, “Are we witnessing the end of the global liberal order?” It is a question that has prompted an outpouring of articles, and recently a book by a similar title, ranging from cautiously optimistic to downright gloomy. Such an atmosphere has provided all the more reason for greater scrutiny of US President Donald Trump’s visit to Asia. Trump’s continued focus on “America First” has elicited concerns from some observers that the United States has relinquished its place at the helm of the liberal world order. Regardless of one’s take on the state of the current liberal order, it is unquestionable that societies across the globe are questioning long-standing traditions, practices, and institutions. Understanding the changes that are happening in politics, societies, and cultures today is an imperative. To this end, we have assembled a collection of submissions on the theme of nations in transition.

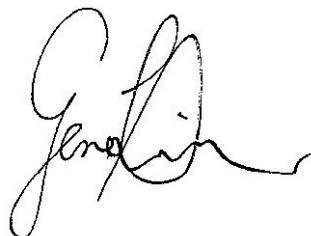
Opening our “Papers” section is Bo Won Kim’s “Facing a Blow to Sovereignty, Why Comply? An Analysis of Compliance at the International Court of Justice,” which comes at an important moment for international institutions, at a time when nationalisms in many countries have asserted their enduring appeal and force. Kim gets at the heart of the question of why states choose to comply with international court rulings despite the lack of enforcement mechanisms. Comparing a case of compliance with one of non-compliance, she finds that high levels of obligation and precision of rulings make compliance more likely. The next paper takes us to South Korea. Kangkyu Lee’s “Presidential Scandals in South Korea since 1993: An Analysis of Resolve in Decision-Making,” and indeed this issue itself, comes at the heels of political transition in South Korea following the impeachment

of Park Geun-hye and election of Moon Jae-in. Lee explores the perennial issue of presidential scandals in South Korea, and through comparative case studies finds a strong link between the trait of “self-control” in a president’s formative years and resolve in office. Meanwhile, Iris Kim’s “Risk Perception, Trust, and Legitimacy: The Interaction of State and Society in Chinese Genetically Modified Food Governance” paper takes us to China in an interesting look at the intersection of technology, state, and society. Kim questions shifts in Chinese public perception of the risks of genetically modified foods and the responsiveness of the Chinese state to such perceptions. She argues for the role of increased media and NGO presence in China in altering notions of the state’s obligations. It will be interesting to observe further changes in the “new era” declared by Xi Jinping at the 19th Communist Party Congress held this year.

David Tian opens our “Essays” section with his work “Scarlet Fever in North Korea: Public Health as a Motivating Factor for China to Repatriate Defectors.” Tian takes a novel approach towards the issue of North Korean defectors in China by incorporating a public health perspective. Despite international condemnation, China has persisted in repatriating North Korean defectors. Tian suggests public health concerns may factor into Beijing’s calculus on defector policy and argues that addressing this issue may lead to productive results. Moving on to Southeast Asia, Sydney Piggott situates recent political crises in Thailand within its broader political history and identifies peasant rebellion movements in rural areas. Piggott traces the rise of the peasant uprising known as the “Red Shirts Movement” and finds its roots in the context of economic growth, rural diversification, and regime change in Thailand. Erina Kimura covers a different kind of phenomenon that is developing in Asia. Kimura questions the practices of cultural diplomacy and the exclusionary effects these may have on minorities in Japan that are not deemed as being “authentic” Japanese. She argues that this issue is particularly important when considered in conjunction with the phenomenon of global migration and offers suggestions for reconsidering the dangers of such practices. Finally, returning to the international level, Matthew Pullen offers an important analysis of the Trade Facilitation Agreement of the World Trade Organization, which was passed in 2013 but only entered into force in February of this year. Pullen evaluates the ostensible goals of the agreement and potential economic impact, and uses regressions to determine patterns in countries’ willingness to adopt such reforms. Pullen’s essay thus contributes to discussions on the changing international economic order.

It is no easy feat to put together a journal that covers so wide a variety of topics as this one aims to do. Even the category of “international studies” remains broad, as the content of our journal’s issues have demonstrated. Managing such a journal and ensuring high quality work gets published can only be made possible through the dedication of many people. Editors-in-chief of this journal in recent years have served short terms, but the devotion of the editorial team has remained a constant. As I have witnessed through my semester as editor-in-chief, it is only through the tireless work and support of the editorial team semester after semester that make this journal possible. For that, I am immeasurably grateful and wish future editors-in-chief as great of a team as with which I have been blessed.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gene Kim". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Gene" on top and "Kim" below it, both sharing a common vertical stroke.

Gene Kim
Editor in Chief