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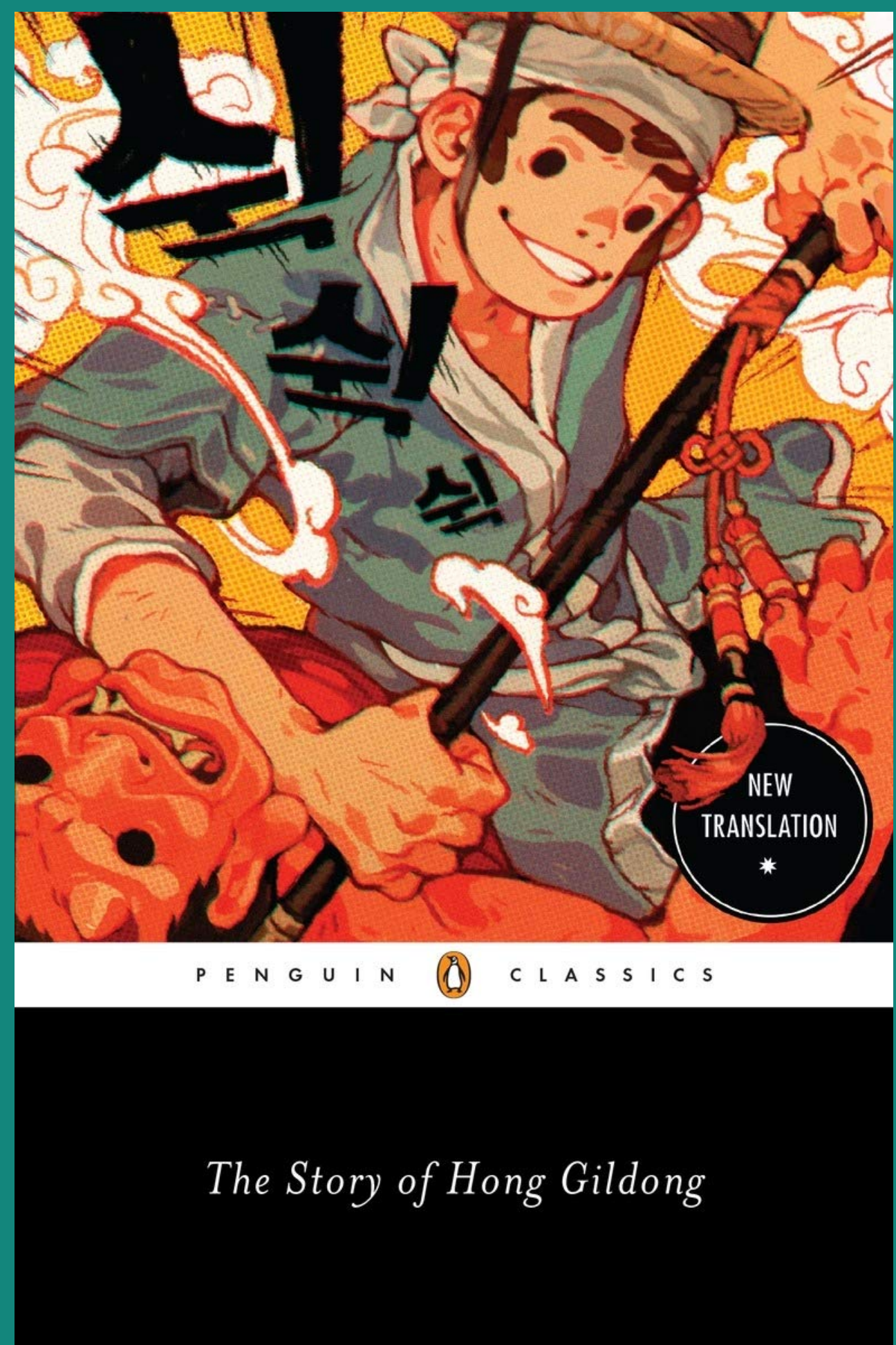
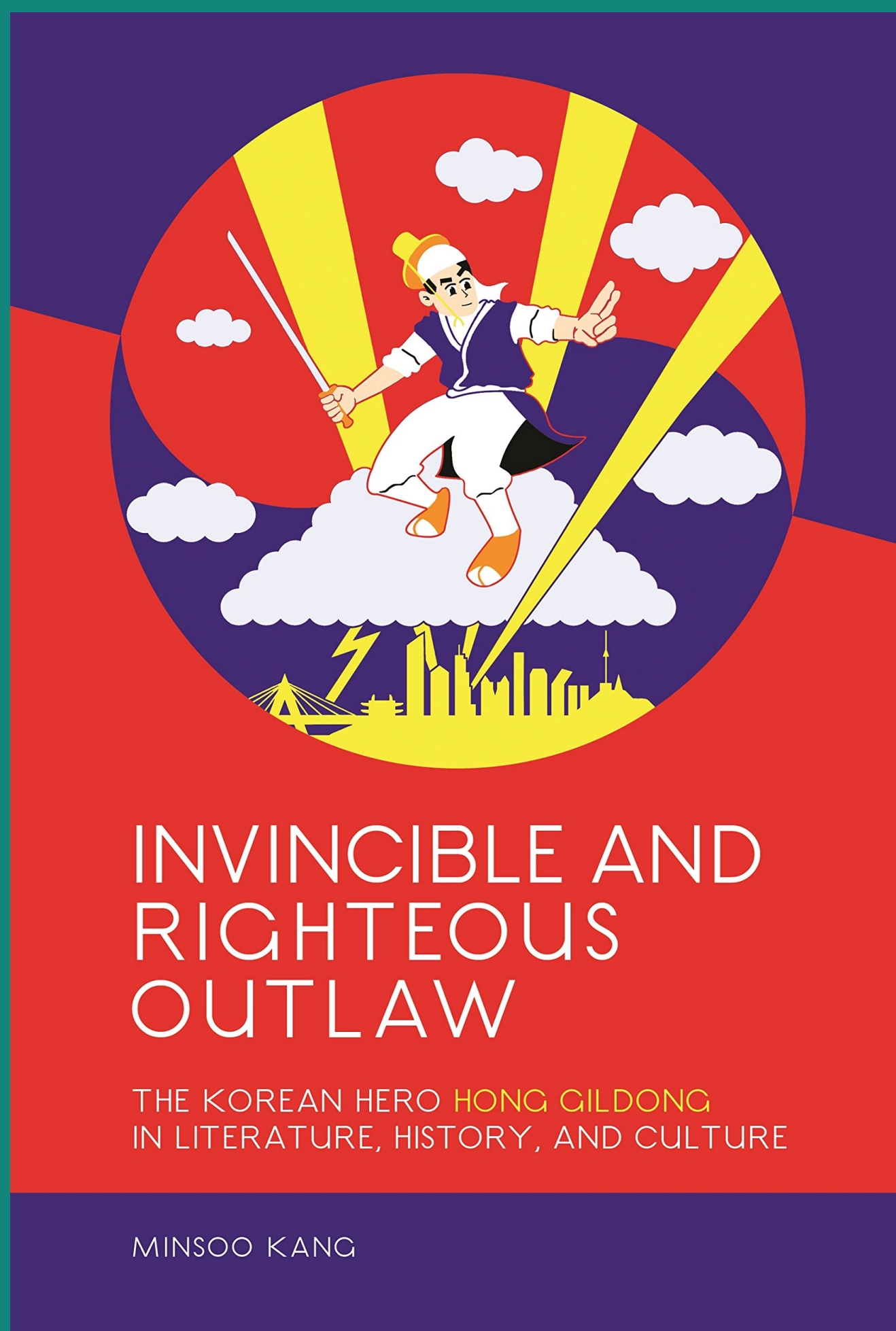
Centre for
Korean Research

The Authorship Question of *The Story of Hong Gildong* and Its Place in Classical Korean Literature

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 5PM-6PM (PDT)

DR. MINSOO KANG

(UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI – ST. LOUIS)



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The Authorship Question of *The Story of Hong Gildong* and Its Place in Classical Korean Literature

- Minsoo Kang is a professor of history at the University of Missouri – St. Louis. He is the author of the book *Sublime Dreams of Living Machines: The Automaton in the European Imagination* (Harvard University Press, 2011) and co-editor of the essay collection *Visions of the Industrial Age: Modernity and the Anxiety of Representation in Europe 1830-1914* (Ashgate Publishing, 2008). In 2016, he made a new translation of *The Story of Hong Gildong* which was published as a Penguin Classic, the first work translated from Korean to appear in the series. He has also translated and published *The Story of the Virtue of Queen Inhyeon, Lady Min* (『인현성모 민씨 덕행록』) and *The Story of Jeon Unchi* (『전운치전』). Most recently, he has published a book-length study of *The Story of Hong Gildong* and its influence on Korean culture, *Invincible and Righteous Outlaw: The Korean Hero Hong Gildong in Literature, History and Culture* (University of Hawaii Press, 2019)

- There is no doubt that *The Story of Hong Gildong* (『홍길동전』) is one of the most important works of prose fiction of premodern Korea, and perhaps still the most beloved. There are, however, a number of persistent myths about its significance that have distorted scholarly understanding of the work, including its traditional attribution to Heo Gyun (허균) and the dating of its composition to the early seventeenth century. This has also led to the interpretation of *The Story of Hong Gildong* as essentially a work of political protest literature criticizing Joseon dynasty policy on illegitimate children (서자) as well its entire feudal structure. Such views originate with the colonial-era literary scholar Kim Taejun (김태준), the author of the enormously influential work *History of Joseon Fiction* (『조선소설사』 , 1930-31). In my book, I sought to make the definitive case that *The Story of Hong Gildong* could not have been written before the nineteenth century as it features all the characteristics of popular fiction written in hangeul that began to appear in the late eighteenth century. I also contend that while all fictional narratives (소설) of the Joseon dynasty tend to be lumped together, the hangeul fiction that was written by commoner writers for commoner readership should be treated as a separate and special category of writing that points to a genuine people's literature in the late Joseon period.