

Hyeok Hweon Kang, *Harvard University*
For “*Divine Machine: Korea’s Reception of the Gun*”

The Robinson Prize Committee is pleased to award the 2018 Joan Cahalin Robinson Prize for the best first-time presentation at SHOT’s annual meeting to Hyeok Hweon Kang for “*Divine Machine: Korea’s Reception of the Gun*.” Mr. Kang, a Ph.D. Candidate at Harvard University, delivered an engaging presentation on the use of firearms in 16th and 17th century Korea.

Mr. Kang convincingly linked the rise of a professional military in Korea with the rise of gunpowder weapons, a development that met with resistance from established military circles for a couple of reasons. First, it threatened to upend traditional military strategies based on the bow, for firearms were slower and less accurate in use than the bow. Second—and for Mr. Kang much more important—it threatened to upend traditional social structures and power dynamics. With the advent of muskets, slaves could now serve in the military for the first time (and could even win their freedom with a perfect 3/3 score in a musket firing-range test), much to the chagrin of slaveowners and military elites alike. Ultimately, the musket became the weapon of the general infantry, while the bow remained the weapon of choice for the military elite.

Mr. Kang used this story of a disruptive new technology to make a compelling case for an intervention in the established literature on the professionalization and proletarianization of armed forces. In this case, Mr. Kang demonstrated that firearms were easy to use, but difficult to apply in a real-life military setting. By this he meant two things—first, that the weapons were easy to use, but because of their inherent limitations in terms of accuracy and speed were difficult to incorporate into larger tactics and strategies; and second, that precisely because the weapons were easy to use, they threatened established patterns of military service and social structures within Korea.

Several elements of Mr. Kang’s presentation impressed the judges. First and foremost was the clarity of the presentation itself. He did not read his paper, but rather talked through it in a lively and engaging fashion. Second, he did not try to pack too much into the talk, but instead hit just the right balance between substance and argument. Third, and finally, Mr. Kang’s use of PowerPoint was spot-on. He did not use text-heavy slides as a crutch, nor did he use image-rich slides as window dressing. Instead the slides did analytical work for him as he worked his way through his material—for example, toward the end of his talk, he used his slides to map out the extant historiography and his place within it, all without getting too wonkish and without drowning in a sea of words on the screen. Most of us could learn a thing or two from his use of PowerPoint.

Lively, engaging, substantive, and convincing, Mr. Kang’s presentation stood out as fitting perfectly the spirit and aims of the Joan Cahalin Robinson Prize. The committee was impressed with his work and looks forward to seeing more from Mr. Kang in the years to come.