

Impact of Scholarly Communication in Korea on Korean Studies in North America

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Dr. Kwon gave a good overview of the Korean scholarly communication environment. I would like to focus on how these recent developments in Korea are affecting Korean Studies scholars and librarians in North America. Since all Korean studies librarians outside of Korea greatly depend on scholarly information from Korea, what's happening in Korea have a direct and immediate impact on their work.

First let me give you a brief history and a snapshot of the current state of Korean Studies collections in North America as a background. First Korean language courses seem to have appeared in American universities in the late 1930s and early 1940s. When the Korean War broke out in 1950, an army training program began teaching the Korean language, and soon universities began offering courses in Korean history and culture beyond the language. Within ten years, six notable holdings of Korean collections had accumulated, including the Library of Congress Harvard-Yenching, Columbia University, UC Berkeley, the University of Washington, and the University of Hawaii. Following a slow growth up until the late 1980s, Korean Studies programs have flourished since when foundations in Korea, backed by government funds, began investing in building Korean studies programs in the U.S. As of June 18, 2008, the online "Koreanists" directory of the Korea Foundation (www.kf.or.kr) lists 3,354 Korean studies experts in 91 countries. The highest concentrations may be found in China with 961 Koreanists, followed by the US (518), the Russian Federation (270), and Japan (212).

The growth of Korean Studies in North America is reflected in library collections as well. In the most recent Council on East Asian Libraries statistics survey, as of June 2007, forty seven libraries reported as having at least some Korean collections, and 18 of them had more than 10,000 volumes. The combined holdings of these libraries were approaching 1.1 million volumes. Among the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean collections which typically form East Asian Libraries, Korea is the fastest growing field. In 1960, the holdings of Korean materials comprised less than 1% (0.9%) of the total holdings of all East Asian collections. Within less than 50 years, it has grown to 7%. In terms of fiscal support for collections excluding grants and endowments, in FY 2007, 7.8% of all EAL collections budget was allocated to Korean acquisitions. In the same period, Korean professional and support staff accounted for 13.5% and 11% of overall East Asian personnel, respectively. These personnel statistics could be somewhat inflated in that portions of some Chinese or Japanese librarians' time were counted as Korean because they devote some of their time to Korean as their secondary assignments. While the upward trend for Korean collections and personnel is obvious, there is no question about by far the minority status of Korean collections in the broader East Asian librarianship landscape.

There are areas that Korea has an edge over China and Japan: namely, digital content and information technology. It is ironic that the 1997 financial crisis that forced Korea into an IMF bailout program served as arguably the single most powerful catalyst for advancing scholarly communication in modern history. Recognizing the importance of information in the knowledge based economy, the Korean government coined the term 'informatization' (meaning a process of creating an advanced information society) and adopted it as a core strategy in its effort to emerge from its troubled economy. Over the next few years the government invested heavily in 'informatization'. Billions of dollars were spent on digitizing significant holdings of libraries, research centers, museums, and governments, and on the development of metadata. Today, as Dr. Kwon mentioned, Korea is one of the most advanced countries in the world in terms of information technology and the digitization of national knowledge. Thanks to Korea's ambition to create the world's first 'ubiquitous society,' where information can be "accessed from

anywhere, at any time, by anyone and anything,” virtual libraries are fast becoming a reality in Korea. Koreans enjoy easy access to information from anywhere via their computers and handheld devices such as cell phones or PDAs. In fact, information technology is so pervasive in their daily life that they are hardly conscious of it.

So how does it impact those of us outside of Korea? Well, we all know that the Internet has no borders. All the free resources created and available in Korea are just as accessible outside. These include all the traditional bibliographic tools and much, much more. For example, bibliographies, indexes, and tables of contents are directly linked to the full-texts whenever available, and those protected by the copyright are linked to the membership-based national copyright management center for easy payment and access. There is an impressive wealth of full-text dissertations, rare books, historic newspapers and documents, photographs, maps, movies, statistics-- just waiting to be mined and discovered. A number of great portal sites were created to facilitate the discovery of these rich resources, such as www.knowledge.go.kr, www.dlibrary.go.kr.

While these free online resources offer a relief to Korean studies librarians who have long been suffering from the shortage of acquisitions funds, it does not mean that they need any less money than before. In fact, the need is many times bigger now than a few years ago for many reasons. The most obvious and challenging are the expensive commercial databases. Of particular interest to Korean studies librarians is E Korean Studies www.ekoreanstudies.com, a consortium of six major commercial database companies. What’s wonderful about this consortium is that it offers integrated searching to the multi-company databases, covering all academic disciplines including North Korean. These are essential resources, but very expensive, beyond the means most of Korean studies libraries in North America. In an attempt to amass a collective bargaining power, the Korean Collections Consortium of North America and the Korean Materials Committee of the Council on East Asian Libraries jointly created a task force to negotiate group rates on behalf of all interested libraries in North America. The task force also arranged a free trial period for any interested libraries. Those who wish to participate in the group licensing deal and/or the free trial should contact Hana Kim of

the University of Toronto, who is heading the effort as the Chair of the two organizations behind the task force.

Before I close, I wish to share a personal experience to illustrate how globally interconnected we are. A few years ago when I was attending the World Koreanists Congress in Korea, a professor who came from New Zealand, a total stranger, walked up to me and thanked for my library's video collection. He said that he borrowed a Korean movie, *Our Twisted Hero*, from our library via ILL for his political science class. According to him, it is an important movie that illustrates key political concepts, but because it is an old movie, he had been having a hard time obtaining a copy. He was very grateful that USC, my university, was willing to loan the video all the way to New Zealand. It so happened that USC's Korean video collection was built with grants from the Korea Foundation, which is funded by the Korean government. When the Korean people paid their taxes, would they have imagined that their hard-earned tax money would help buy a Korean video for a University library in Los Angeles, and this little old video would travel around half of the globe to touch the lives of young University students in New Zealand? Come to think of it, would this have been possible without the work of my colleague at USC who selected and preserved the video and cataloged it to aid the discovery? You see, librarians are in the business of match making, connecting information to people. Long after we are gone, the collections and metadata that we created will remain and touch the lives of many generations around the globe. With that, I salute you, my fellow librarians, keep on matchmaking! Thank you!