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The Past, Present and Future of Korean Studies at Yale University

I would like to thank Prof. Emanuel Pastreich and his colleagues for their kind invitation to speak to you this afternoon. I would like to share with you the state of Korean studies at my home institution, Yale University.

The tremendous growth in Korean studies at institutions of higher learning in North America over the past two decades is well known. This is primarily the result not only of the entry of Korean-American and Korean-Canadian students into our schools, and the invaluable support of the Korea Foundation in funding new positions, library acquisitions and the like, but also of the realization by academics in Chinese and

Japanese studies that the history and culture of East Asia cannot be properly taught without reference to the Korean peninsula and its people.

Yale University, perhaps uniquely among the major centers of East Asian studies in North America, lags behind in this regard. Our faculty who specialize on China or Japan is large and distinguished, and for over a hundred years Yale has had Korean students studying on campus. The first Korean to enroll at Yale was Ryang Ju-sam, who graduated from the Divinity School in 1914 and became an important Christian leader in South Korea. We count among our more recent alumni many prominent Koreans: Lee Hong Koo (PhD, 1963), Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea in 1994 and 1995, as well as ambassador to the United States from 1998 to 2000; Chang Sang (Divinity, 1970), president of Ehwa University and the first woman to be nominated for the post of Prime Minister; and the late Park Seong-yawng (PhD, 1965), chairman of the Kumho-Asiana group and an important patron of the arts in South Korea. (I also want to add that James Laney, a graduate of both Yale College and the Graduate School, was U.S. Ambassador to South Korea from 1993 to 1997.)

But the history of Koreans studying the sciences, theology and Western civilization, is not the history of American students learning about Korea. That is changing, but not fast enough. We have had a active and growing Korean language program since 1990, and there are faculty such as Mimi Yiengpruksawan in the History of Art Department, Peter Perdue in the History department, myself in East Asian Languages and Literatures, all with interests in Korea in addition to China or Japan. With the assistance of the Korean Foundation we have hosted visiting professors such as Jaymin Lee, the Yonsei University economist; Youngsook Park, the former professor of

Korean art at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London; Kyung Moon Hwang of the history department at the University of Southern California; and Marcus Noland, senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington, DC and a specialist on the North Korean economy. Still, we lack both tenured and tenure-track Koreanists as well as a major in Korean studies at either the undergraduate or graduate level, although a recent hire in Political Science, Assistant Professor Seokju Cho, has an ancillary interest in Korean studies, as does Youn-mi Kim, our new colleague in art history but a graduate of SNU who intends to teach Korean art history as well as Chinese. Part of my mission each time I travel to Seoul here to meet with scholars and officials and discuss our plans for the future, as I have done today at Kyung Hee University.

Yale has a past upon which to build. Yale was, in fact, once a leader in “Korean studies” before the field even existed. Samuel Martin, the foremost linguist of the Korean language outside of Korea itself, was a member of the Yale senior faculty for many years and produced students who now dominate the field of Korean linguistics in the U.S. and Canada. Professor Martin, however, worked in relative isolation at Yale, and his presence did not result in the recruitment to campus of Korean historians, social scientists or literature specialists. With his retirement some years ago, the possibility of expanding Korean studies at Yale effectively disappeared.

I am pleased to report today that the situation may be changing at Yale. With the assistance of the Korean Foundation, we are continuing to build the library holdings in Korean-language materials and we continue to appoint a teaching post-doctoral associate in Korean studies every year with funds granted from the Ford Foundation. For three

years in the recent past we hosted a series of visiting Korean Foundation professors. They have taught Yale students in disciplines ranging from modern and pre-modern Korean history, to economics (both of the ROK and DPRK) to the history of art.

It is my hope that Yale will create at least one tenure-track position in Korean studies. Our financial crisis since 2008 has made it difficult to expand what Yale does, but I am optimistic. In my talk this afternoon I will report on the current condition of Korean studies at Yale, the direction that those of us on the faculty interested in Korea hope to pursue with both our own resources and continued support of interested donors and organizations.

Yale has had a deep and rich relationship with Korea that spans a century. We take great pride in the breadth and strength of our East Asian studies program that is located primarily in the Council on East Asian Studies (CEAS) and the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures (EALL). Several of Yale's professional schools (one of which, the Law School, was headed by a Korean-American, Harold Koh, who is now a high official in the State Department with special responsibility for human rights) have embarked on collaborative projects with the Republic of Korea, and many Yale faculty have chosen Korea as an area of research and teaching. South Korea has been and continues to be an important, long-standing partner in Yale's scholastic mission.

There are currently more than two dozen Korean nationals enrolled in Yale College, the undergraduate school at Yale. Four times that number are graduate or professional students, with a conspicuous presence in both the School of Music and the Divinity School. We have something close to 100 faculty and researchers on campus, many in the School of Medicine, from Korea. Our Korean alumni number in the hundreds,

including several from our new Yale World Fellows program in the Center for Globalization; and there are faculty such as myself, often in the sciences, collaborating with colleagues here in the ROK on important research. In 2003 I accompanied our president, Richard C. Levin, on a trip to Seoul where we met with Seoul National University officials to discuss closer ties. It was then, when President Levin and I were stuck in his limousine during a Seoul traffic jam, that we hatched the plan to approach the Korean Foundation for the funds to subsidize a visiting position in Korean studies that would, hopefully, lead one day to a permanent one.

Yale's collections and archives include valuable resources on and from Korea. The Korean collection in Sterling Memorial Library, the research library, while not large when compared to such schools as Harvard or Columbia, is growing rapidly thanks to increased support from both Yale and the Korea Foundation. (Librarians visiting from Korea, including Seoul National University, have helped to plan our acquisitions.) Additionally the Divinity School, the Map Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, the Social Sciences and Economic Growth Center not to mention the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library all house significant collections, including quite rare manuscripts as well as printed works that, by the way, the National Assembly Library has been digitalizing to make available worldwide. I also want to mention that the Yale Art Gallery possesses a number of Korean objects, including paintings, sculpture and ceramics.

Our Korean language program, directed by Dr. Seungja Kim Choi (a graduate of Yonsei and a Yale PhD in linguistics), enrolled over fifty students this past academic year in first through fourth-year levels of instruction, for both heritage and non-heritage

learners. Yale is unique among American institutions of higher learning in that it promises every student of Chinese, Japanese or Korean the opportunity to study *in situ* either for a summer, semester or academic year. This summer there will be a dozen or more Yale undergraduates studying Korean intensively at schools such as SNU, Yonsei, Korea University, Ewha and Sogang. This is made possible through the generous support of the Richard C. Light Program, which has invested heavily in Asian language education for American students.

Where do we go from here? Personally, I believe we need to work hard to create a new position in the history of modern Korea within Yale's Department of History. Once we have a Korea historian on our faculty, he or she will take the lead in building Korean studies across the curriculum. We also hope to expand ties between Yale and more universities in Korea, including Kyung Hee.

Let me conclude on a personal note. I first visited South Korea in November, 1974, arriving in Pusan on a ferry in third-class steerage from Shimonoseki. An American soldier I had befriended aboard ship gave me and my then-girlfriend a ride to Seoul, where we stayed in a dark and musty *yogwan* and, not knowing a word in Korean, explored a vast city so different from anything I'd encountered in my native New England. Korea was then not, as it is today, a wealthy country. I recall women washing laundry on the shores of the Han river; and I especially recall eating like a king for less than a single U.S. dollar. I remember traffic coming to a halt when sirens wailed in the afternoon; I remember children begging on the streets; I remember the armed troops guarding President Park Chung-hee's Cheongwadae (Blue House). But Korea won my heart, and though it took me many years to return, I did. I want to thank you for this

opportunity to speak to you today at Kyung Hee, and I thank you for your hospitality. Let me now stop, so that I may hear your comments and answer whatever questions you might want to pose about Korean studies in North America. Thank you. *Kamsa hamnida.*