

## Korea Sessions in the 2005 Association for Asian Studies Annual Meeting

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### Introduction

The Association for Asian Studies Annual Conference is the most authoritative academic meeting on topics of Asia. The 2005 Association for Asian Studies Annual Meeting was held at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Chicago, U.S.A. from March 31 to April 3. 213 sessions were held in total. Thirty five sessions were related to Korea, occupying about sixteen percent. Among these, thirteen sessions were concerned only with Korea and the other twenty two sessions dealt with Korea and other Asian nations. This conference report will be primarily based on an analysis of the thirteen sessions concerned only with Korea, in which forty articles were presented and two roundtable sessions were held, and some other Korea related sessions in which I personally participated as a presenter or an audience. In particular, I took part in the session of "Windfalls and Pitfalls of the Digitization of the Tripitakas" (Session 3) as a presenter and joined the session of "Reconstructing Medieval Korean Buddhism" (Session 203) as an audience pursuing the same discipline. In content, an introductory account of the sessions on Korea will be provided, followed by an analysis of them in terms of participants, discipline, and period.

Papers presented in Korean sessions are grouped into seven disciplines: culture, gender issues, history, information, politics, literature and religion. Session topics by discipline were as follows: "Korean Cinema: Texts and Contexts, from Post Liberation to the Post IMF Eras" (Session 144) and

“Shifting Images of Korea: Visual Representation of Korean Culture” (Session 163) in culture, “Authoritarian Legacies and Democratic Fortunes” (Session 29), “Confucianism and Women in Late Chosŏn Korea” (Session 48), and “Practices of the Body, Discourses of the Mind: The New Woman in Colonial Korea” (Session 125) in gender issues, “The Park Era as History” (Session 9) and “The Japanese Censorship System and Korean Responses in Colonial Korea” (Session 106) in history, “Roundtable: Electronic Resources and Korean Studies” (Session 67) in information, “Roundtable: The Impeachment of Rho, Moo Hyun: One Year Later” (Session 183) and “The Politics of Reform in Colonial and Liberated Korea” (Session 204) in politics, “Literature of the Haebang konggan” (Session 30) in literature, and “Christianity and the (Re)Construction of Self and Other in Korea” (Session 182) and “Reconstructing Medieval Korean Buddhism” in religion.

In the session of “Windfalls and Pitfalls: The Use of Digitized Source Material in the Study of Asian Buddhism,” which was organized by Professor Morten Schlütter of the University of Iowa, four panelists, including myself, presented papers concerning digitized resources of Buddhism in China, Korea, and Tibet. In this panel, an international group of scholars discussed various recently digitized resources and raised a number of questions and issues regarding how these sources are conceived, produced and used in Asian studies in general. In my paper, “The Digital *Tripitaka Koreana 2004*,” I introduced an important new research tool, the *Tripitaka Koreana 2004*, for East Asian Buddhist Studies, discussed the benefits and problems faced by academic end users in its use for research on East Asian Buddhist studies, and argued that a digitization project of Buddhist classics should consider the demands of Buddhist scholars as end users. In his “Historical Inscriptions at Cloud Dwelling Monastery: Preparations for a CD-ROM,” Matthias Arnold, Professor of the University of Heidelberg, introduced the user interface of the on going project, discussed solutions for problems, addressed the opportunities and issues for scholarship that the project presents, and argued that the CD-ROM must not only provide full text search, but also offer special indices and background information. In his “Digitized Sources in the Study of Chan Buddhism,” Mario Poceski, Professor of the University of Florida, explored the prospects and challenges

posed by the use of digitized sources in the study of Chinese Buddhism, with a focus on materials about the history of Chan during the Tang dynasty. In his "Digitization in Tibetan Buddhist Studies: Problems and Remedies," Jan Ulrich Sobisch, Professor of the University of Copenhagen, examined the shortcomings of some of the available Tibetan digital texts and dictionaries, including a need for careful and critical scholarship in philology and lexicology, analyzed their possible causes, and discussed some of the possible remedies.

Organized by Richard D. McBride, Post-doctoral Research Fellow of Washington University, St. Louis, and chaired and discussed by Robert E. Buswell, Jr., Professor of UCLA, three articles were presented in the session of "Reconstructing Medieval Korean Buddhism." The Buddhist church on the Korean peninsula passed through a crucial period of transitions stretching from the late Silla (ca. 800-935) through the Koryŏ periods (918-1392). Korean and Japanese scholars of this period have emphasized the continuity of the Buddhist beliefs, practices, and rituals of the later Silla period in Koryŏ times, including the completion of the Nine Mountains of Sŏn (Chan in Chinese, Zen in Japanese). Western scholars also have executed much seminal research, but many issues still remained to be explored regarding this period of Korean Buddhism. The presentations on this panel attempted to shed new light on this seminal time in the development of Korean Buddhism.

In his "The *Chodang chip* and Korean Buddhism," Sem Vermeersch, Research Professor at Keimyung University (Taegu, Korea), focused on the Korean connection of the *Chodang chip* (Patriarch's Hall Collection), the first extant collection of texts that seeks to portray Chan as a distinct tradition of Buddhism. In particular, he demonstrated that the Korean connection was no mere accident: There was a very intensive exchange of students and monks between the Koryŏ and Wu-Yue kingdoms, leading to cross fertilization on equal terms. Against this background, he argued that the incorporation of Korean Sŏn Buddhism was thought to be an important task in defining a Chan tradition that was in many ways still in a formative process. In his "The Transmission of Linji Chan in Late Koryŏ: A Reappraisal," Patrick R. Uhlmann of University of California, Los Angeles, analyzed the

trajectory of T'aego Pou (1301-1382) and Naong Hyegün (1320-1376), who introduced the newest form of Linji Chan from Yuan China to Korea, within the broader socio political context. He argued that, rather than doctrinal, socio political factors motivated them to seek the transmission of Linji Chan and the primary criterion differentiating Pou from Hyegün was monk examinations: In contrast to Pou and his disciples, Hyegün and most monks of his entourage did not take or pass monk examinations. In his article, "Why Did Kungye Claim to be the Buddha Maitreya?: The Maitreya Cult and Royal Power in the Silla Koryŏ Transition," McBride criticized contemporary scholarship on the meaning of Maitreya worship and argued that aspects of mainstream cultic worship, old Paekche and Koguryŏ symbols of political legitimacy and royal power, and widely held conceptualizations of the decline of the Buddhadharma converge to explain why *being* Maitreya was seminal to the plan of Kungye (d. 918), rebel and founder of the state of Later Koguryŏ (901-18), for the conquest and re unification of the Later Three Kingdoms.

## Analysis

Sessions on Korea held in the AAS annual meeting are gradually increasing in number. In particular, those held in the 2005 AAS conference covered a variety of disciplines. However, they also left room for reflection in terms of participants, discipline, and period.

### 1. Participants

Participants in the above mentioned sessions on Korea were more than sixty, representing 2.5% of paid attendance in the conference. To the best of my knowledge, the majority of them were university and college faculty. In contrast, almost no graduate students and Ph.D. candidates from Korea participated. This means that the succeeding generation of Korean academic circles is not allowed to participate in the international academic world and their global competitiveness is of grave concern. According to *The Annual Meeting Report*, which was published by the AAS after the annual meeting,

paid attendance was 2,549, university and college faculty were most in registration by organizational affiliation, demonstrating 46.6% with 1,188 people, followed by graduate students and Ph.D. candidates which revealed 14.8% with 377 people. Therefore, Korean academic world needs to provide scholars of younger generation with opportunities for taking part in the global academic arena.

Another distinctive feature newly emerged in the international field of Asian Studies seems to be the rise of both non-Asian scholars and descendants of Asian immigrants to North American countries, in particular, to the U.S. For example, all of the three speakers in Session 203 were those of foreign origin, that is, an American, a Swedish, and a Dutch. The session moderator was also an American. No participant of Korean origin was found there. In addition, four out of five participants in Session 3, except for myself, were speakers of non-Asian origin. Furthermore, the second and the third generation presenters of Asian immigrants to the West also came to the fore. Some examples are found in Sessions 30, 67, 144, 94 ("The Uses of Manuscript Culture"), and 98 ("Reconfiguring Material Objects and Structures in East Asian Buddhism"). As I recall, this is a new phenomenon to form a striking contrast to about a decade ago, when students from Asian countries were dominant in the field of Asian Studies in American academia.

## 2. Disciplines

Sessions on Korea by discipline were limited to specific issues. The number of sessions by discipline were as follows: three on gender issues, two on culture, history, and religion, respectively, and one on information, politics, and literature each. This result indicates that the greatest number of sessions were held on gender issues, which is different from the analysis of Professor Pak T'aegyun of Seoul National University, who argued in his own conference report<sup>1</sup> on the 2005 AAS annual meeting that papers on Korea were by and large related to culture. *The Annual Meeting Report* says that China and

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<sup>1</sup> "The limits of Cultural Approach... Only Ideas Were Flowing While Lacking Depth" (in Korean) in *Kyosu sinmun*(April 23, 2005

Inner Asia and Northeast Asia ranked first and second in registration by area of specialization, exhibiting 34.9% and 29.1%, respectively, and history occupied the largest registration by discipline, showing 25.5% with 652 registrations. Sessions on Korean history were only two (Sessions 9 and 106), occupying only 15% out of the total sessions on Korea. In addition, there were no sessions on other important disciplines such as philosophy, arts, economy, etc.

Some impending issues concerned with three East Asian countries, China, Korea, and Japan, are still in progress. The following are among them: Debate on the historical identity of Koguryŏ (37 BCE-668 CE) between Korea and China, and textbook controversy and issues on Tokto Island ("Takeshima" in Japanese) between Korea and Japan. However, no articles on these topics were presented in the sessions on Korea, even including the sessions on Korean history, which has been a representative discipline of Korean Studies.

It was only in an international conference, which was held at Columbia University, New York, U.S., on July 18, 2005, co-sponsored by the Center for Korean Studies at Columbia University and the Academy of Korean Studies, that issues on the text controversy between Korea and Japan were discussed among scholars and interested civilians in the West for the first time. In addition, it was in the 2005 Biennial Conference of the Association for Korean Studies in Europe (AKSE), which was held at the University of Sheffield, London, England, on July 4-8, 2005, that the issues of Koguryŏ and Tokto were presented in the West for the first time. Two papers on these issues were demonstrated by North Korean scholars on the subject of "Issues in Contemporary Korean Territorial Sovereignty" in Academy of Social Sciences of the DPRK Special Panel 1. They were "Koguryŏ : A Sovereign State of Korea" by Hui Sung Jo and "Tok-to: An Inalienable Part of Korean's Territory" by Myong Song Kong. In particular, these impending issues in contemporary Korea are closely related to the premodern history of Korea, but there was no session on the subject, except only for Session 203 held in the field of religion.

Why have South Korean historians held their tongues over these issues

in the international academic meetings? In Korean historiography, there are largely two shortcomings: Parochialism and deficient methodology. Korean historians show the indifference to and ignorance of histories outside Korea. They are also characterized by the compartmentalization of history with conservative and less interdisciplinary approach. Korea is now an open society. Korean historical circles are not exceptional in this regard and require scholars who can flourish globally. However, the reality of Korean historical circles hardly provides such qualified scholars with a chance to be hired as a professor, if they lack personal relationships or are scholars from a different scholastic mantle. As a result, there are few Korean historians who are active in the international academic arena. However, in his "Preface" to the *Nonjaeng ūro ponŭn Chungguk ch'ŏrhak* (Chinese Philosophy Seen Through Controversies) published in 1994, Ch'ungnyŏl Kim, Professor of Korea University, already argued that Western scholars went ahead of Korean scholars in the field of East Asian Studies and called upon the latter to make more strenuous efforts for the promotion of their scholarly achievements. Therefore, Korean historians are in an urgent need of freeing themselves from parochialism.

Korean historiography has been characterized by three paradigms of history writing Nationalist, Rankean, and Marxist. In particular, by the early 1990s, there emerged several types of historiography which mix some elements of the three paradigms and most historians seem to mix some elements of all three paradigms. However, few historians of South Korea mastered any of the three paradigms. Furthermore, North Korean historiography is monolithic in nature, glorifying the personality cult of Kim Il-sŏng, the founder of North Korea, and his family members often fabricating their history on the basis of the *Chuch'e* (self reliance) ideology. Therefore, Korean historians need to broaden their outlook, improve their methodology by learning from others and adopt more global standards.

### 3. Period Specializations

The sessions on Korea held in the conference laid a disproportionate emphasis on the modern period of Korea. Those on modern Korea after 1876,

when Korea first opened its door to a foreign country for the first time, were held more than three times than those on premodern Korea, the former being eleven, occupying about 77%, while the latter being only two (Sessions 48 and 203). However, this imbalance is problematic. In particular, this is more so if we consider that the above mentioned issues in contemporary Korea are directly related to the premodern history of Korea.

## **Conclusion**

In spite of their gradual increase in number, the sessions on Korea held in the 2005 Association for Asian Studies Annual Meeting revealed some problems in terms of participants, discipline, and period. Senior scholars of Korea need to provide younger generations represented by graduate students and Doctoral degree candidates with more chances to participate in the global academic arena. Korean scholars also necessitate broadening their scholarly horizon beyond their parochial attitude while adopting more global standards. Finally, sessions on Korea held in the international meeting need to be more diversified and systematized by discipline and by period.