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"Standing on Shoulders, Becoming a Giant": Peter H. Lee's Legacy in Korean Literary Studies

Introduction

Before gaining international fame with *Pachinko* (2017), the Korean American novelist, Min Jin Lee, reflected on the versatility and potential of Korean literature in translation in her column for *Chosun ilbo*. In that piece, she described Peter H. Lee as "the most outstanding translator of Korean literature in the United States," while also acknowledging the following generation of translators such as Bruce and Ju-Chan Fulton, David McCann, Kevin O'Rourke, Kim Yeong-mu, and Ahn Junghyo for their pioneering works. Lee also noted, "These translators, without recognition or substantial reward, devoted themselves to introducing Korean literature to readers in the United States and across the English-speaking world. Their work has enabled people around the world to understand Korea more broadly and deeply and to appreciate its cultural and historical richness" (M. Lee 2010).[1] Her words remind us that those who have shaped Korean studies were not solely scholars but also translators who mediated the encounter between Korean literary traditions and global readerships.

Among those mentioned, Peter H. Lee (b. 1929) stands out as both a scholar and translator, whose lifelong dedication to Korean literature profoundly influenced the development of Korean studies in North America. Particularly, his scholarly contributions refined the place of Korean traditional song-poems (*siga* 詩歌) within comparative studies. The decades from the 1960s to the 2000s, when he was most active, were a period when Korean studies remained largely on the margins of the global academic landscape. While academic focus centered on Western literature and Korea was emerging from the aftermath of the Korean War, Lee's work significantly expanded the visibility of Korean literature, articulating its aesthetic distinctiveness in dialogue with both East

1 Translations are the author's own, unless otherwise indicated.

Asian and world literary traditions.

This review examines Lee's pioneering role in shaping the scholarship on premodern Korean literature the field from the mid- to late twentieth century. It also traces how his commitment to Korean poetry emerged and evolved into a lifelong project by drawing on Lee's major publications and research themes, examined in chronological order, as well as two significant interviews conducted by Catherine Ryu (2003) and Mickey Hong (2007), which serve as invaluable oral sources for understanding and interpreting Lee's intellectual legacy.

From Seoul to Los Angeles: Lee's Academic Journey

Born in Seoul in 1929, Peter H. Lee grew up under the influences of his father, a legal profession, and his grandfather, a scholar, well-versed in classical Chinese and Confucian canons. From an early age, he studied literary Chinese and practiced calligraphy under his grandfather's tutelage, cultivating a deep sensitivity to traditional poems and classical texts. Educated in the Japanese colonial era, he gained fluency in Korean, literary Chinese, and Japanese through his formal schooling. This early exposure to multiple languages later formed the foundation for his later scholarly pursuits. At the age of thirteen, Lee encountered English literature, reading Shakespeare, Wordsworth, and Wilde. He was deeply impressed by the universality and emotive power of literature across cultures (Ryu 2003, 122–24).

Lee attended the Preparatory School of Keijō Imperial University, which became Seoul National University after liberation. In 1948, he accepted a scholarship to study English and French literature at the College of St. Thomas in Minnesota and moved to America. After earning his B.A. in 1951, he completed his M.A. in Comparative Literature at Yale University in 1953 under the supervision of René Wellek (1903–1995), a major figure in New Criticism (Ryu 2003, 124–25). Around this time, Lee discovered what would become his lifelong intellectual pursuit: Korean poetry. In the preface to *Poems from Korea* (1974), he later recalled:

> The plan of this book was conceived during my stay in the Graduate School of Yale University, where I first felt it important that someone should introduce and elucidate Korean poetry to the West.… The best of our poetry has always

> been written in Korean, using native poetic genres.…My intention here is to bring Korean poetry close to the modern, non-Korean readers. (P. Lee 1974, 15)

To approach this pursuit with the critical depth, Lee immersed himself in diverse literary and intellectual traditions. During his graduate studies and sojourns in Europe, Lee acquired French, German, and Italian, broadening his intellectual horizons in Europe through engagement with prominent scholars, such as Constantin Regamey (1907–1982), Józef Maria Bocheński (1902–1995), Marie-Dominique Philippe (1912–2006), Pierre-Henri Simon (1903–1972), and Giuseppe Billanovich (1913–2000), who introduced him to diverse literary traditions from medieval philology to comparative literary criticism. These encounters deepened his understanding of how Eastern and Western literary traditions could be read dialogically rather than hierarchically.

In 1958, he earned his Ph.D. at Ludwig-Maximilian University in Munich with a dissertation titled *Studien zum Saenaennorae*: *Altkoreanische Dichtung* (*Studies on the Saenaennorae*: *Old Korean Poetry*), which offered a critical evaluation of Japanese scholars' interpretations of *hyangga* of Silla. This work marked the beginning of his lifelong effort to reinterpret Korean classics through critical and comparative frameworks. Following postdoctoral research at Oxford University's Wadham College, Lee began his teaching career at Columbia University in 1960 on the recommendation of Donald Keene. He later taught at the University of Hawai'i and also at UCLA, where he retired in 2010.

This review traces Lee's works through three chronological stages: an early stage (1959–1969) that laid the foundation in traditional poetry studies; a middle stage (1970–1987) characterized by diversity of scope and topics of research; and a later stage (1987–2007) devoted to narrating Korean literary history. This periodization illuminates his evolving research interests and thematic scope in response to changing trends in Korean studies.

The Early Stage (1959–1969): Establishing the Ground

During his tenure at Columbia and later at the University of Hawai'i, he produced a series of seminal works that coin his scholarly identity:

- *Studies in Old Korean Poetry* (Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1959)

- *Anthology of Korean Poetry from the Earliest Era to the Present* (John Day Company, 1964)
- *Korean Literature: Topics and Themes* (University of Arizona Press, 1965)

His first publication, *Studies in Old Korean Poetry* (1959), based on his doctoral dissertation, offered a critical examination of earlier research on *hyangga* from the Unified Silla period (seventh to tenth centuries). In this study, Lee reassessed earlier Japanese interpretations and laid the foundation for his later comparative approach to Korean poetics.

During his years at Columbia, he published *Anthology of Korean Poetry from the Earliest Era to the Present* (1964), which was later republished as *Poems from Korea*: *A Historical Anthology* (1974), a project he had first envisioned during his years at Yale University. This anthology organizes and presents major works of Korean poetry by historical periods, providing both translations and his own commentary. Included in the collection are such poems as "Song of Sodong" 薯童謠, attributed to King Mu of Baekje; the Buddhist *hyangga* by monks Wolmyeong and Chungdam; Kyunyeo's "The Ten Vows of Samantabhadra" 普賢十願歌; and "Song of Mourning for the Two Generals" 悼二將歌 by King Yejong of the Goryeo dynasty, all translated and contextualized alongside their narratives appearing in *Samguk yusa* (*Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms*). The anthology also includes *sogyo* (folk songs) from Goryeo, as well as the lyrical forms of *sijo* and *gasa* from the Joseon period. Particularly noteworthy is Lee's inclusion of works by female entertainers such as Hwang Jini and Hongrang, along with anonymous poets, to demonstrate the broad spectrum of Korean poetic tradition, interweaving folk and religious elements and aristocratic culture.

Unlike his earlier works, *Korean Literature: Topics and Themes* (1965) offers a systematic analysis of literary genres. It examines the aesthetic features and structural patterns of traditional lyrics from *hyangga*, *jangga*, *akjang* to *sijo* and *gasa*, as well as fictional prose in vernacular Korean and literary Chinese. Lee sought to capture both distinctive forms and contents of each genre, paying close attention to syllabic and rhythmic patterns. His approach went beyond simple substitution of expressions, constituting instead an experiment in transposing the rhythm, perspective, and affective sensibility of Korean verse into English.

Another notable aspect of this work is Lee's effort to situate Korean classical poetry in dialogue with Western literary traditions. For example, in his

translation of "Meeting with Bandits" 遇賊歌, a poem attributed to the monk Yeongjae, who is said to have sung it upon encountering a group of bandits. The speaker declares that while death holds no sorrow for him, he still has much spiritual practice ahead. Lee renders the poem-song as follows:

> My mind that knew not its true self,
> My mind that wandered in the dark and deep,
> Now is started out of bodhi,
> Now is awakened to light.
> But on my way to the city of light,
> I meet with a band of thieves.
> Their swords glitter in the bushes
> Things-as-they-are and things-as-they-are not.
> Well, bandits and I both meditate on the Law:
> But is that sufficient for tomorrow? (P. Lee 1965, 11)

In his analysis, Lee (1965, 11) draws a revealing comparison to the opening canto of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, noting that "The first stanza, which resembles the beginning of the first canto of the *Commedia* in theme and imagery, introduces the first theme, that of journey." This comparison provides Anglophone readers a familiar entry point into "Meeting with Bandits" by invoking the beginning of Dante's spiritual quest. Throughout his career, Lee consistently sought to forge such connections between Korean poetic traditions and Western readers, embodying a belief in the universality of poetic imagination.

The Middle Stage (1970–1987): Expanding the Comparative Methods

After completing a visiting scholar program at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1970, Lee returned to the University of Hawai'i, where he continued his research and teaching until 1987. During this period, he moved beyond the classical poetry that had defined his early career, broadening his scope to include a diverse range of subjects, from Buddhist and Confucian writings to modern fiction. Both his translation and critical work flourished during these years, yielding a series of influential publications:

- *Flowers of Fire*: *Twentieth-Century Korean Stories* (University of Hawai'i Press, 1974)

- *Songs of Flying Dragons*: *A Critical Reading* (Harvard University Press, 1975)
- *Lives of Eminent Korean Monks* (Harvard University Press, 1979)
- *Celebration of Continuity*: *Themes in Classic East Asian Poetry* (Harvard University Press, 1979)
- *Anthology of Korean Literature*: *From Early Times to the Nineteenth Century* (University of Hawai'i Press, 1981)

The first of these, *Flowers of Fire* (1974), is an anthology of translated modern Korean short stories, demonstrating Lee's attempt to extend his literary focus from premodern to modern eras. This was followed by *Anthology of Korean Literature*: *From Early Times to the Nineteenth Century* (1981), which brought together his translations of both premodern and modern texts in verse and prose. His prolific translation activity stemmed not only from scholarly curiosity but also from the pedagogical realities of his teaching environment. Since few literary works were available in English, Lee often translated primary texts himself for classroom use. He recognized early on that translation was an essential foundation for further academic study, so he prompted to expand his translation practice beyond traditional poetry.

In his critical studies, he turned his attention to earliest milestones of Korean literary history: the first work written in the Korean script and the earliest extant Buddhist hagiography in Korea. In *Songs of Flying Dragons*: *A Critical Reading* (1975), he offered both translation and reinterpretation of *Yongbi eocheon ga* 龍飛御天歌, 1447, examining the political ideals of the early Joseon dynasty and the ideological background of the invention of the Korean script. In *Lives of Eminent Korean Monks* (1979), he translated *Haedong goseung jeon* 海東高僧傳, a collection of hagiographies compiled by the Hwaeom Buddhist monk, Gakhun 覺訓 (?–1230), during the late Goryeo period. Through this translation, Lee introduced Western readers to the intellectual and spiritual traditions of Korean Buddhism. Both studies mark an extension of his earlier interest in classical poetry, reflecting his effort to reinterpret Korea's earlier literary sources as products of dynamic interplay between lyrical and narrative modes, and between oral and written traditions.

In *Celebration of Continuity* (1979), Lee adopted a comparative approach to examine recurrent motifs and central themes of East Asian poetry. Identifying the symbolic threads that traverse cultural boundaries, he articulated a shared

poetic sensibility that links East and West. Focusing on five key concepts such as praise, nature, love, friendship, and time, he traced notion of "continuity" through diverse poetic traditions from the *Book of Songs* (*Shijing* 詩經) to Homer's *Iliad*. This ambitious work sought to situate Korean literature not only within the East Asian cultural sphere but also within the broader history of world literature.

The comparative framework that underpins this study aligns with the work of contemporaneous scholars, including James J. Y. Liu (1926–1986), C. T. Hsia (1921–2013), Donald Keene (1922–2019), Masao Miyoshi (1928–2009), and Haruo Shirane (b. 1951). Yet Lee's methodology went beyond simple analogies or typological comparisons. He refused to treat Korean literature as simply resembling Western or Chinese literature, while also rejecting an overemphasis on its cultural distinctiveness. Rather, he sought to enable readers to engage directly with the poet's imagination, freed from cultural biases or language barriers. His efforts aimed to "return the poem to its right place" (P. Lee 1979, 4). This careful balance between universality and particularity characterizes the signature of Lee's scholarship.

The Later Stage (1987–2007): *Broadening the Horizon*

After 1987, Peter H. Lee joined the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he remained until his retirement in 2007. During this period, he emerged as one of the leading figures in Korean studies in the United States. It was a time of both active mentorship—devoted to training younger scholars—and intellectual culmination, marked by a series of translations, anthologies, and essays that represent the apex of his scholarly career.

- *A Korean Storyteller's Miscellany*: *The P'aegwan Chapki of O Sukkwŏn* (Princeton University Press, 1989)
- *Pine River and Lone Peak*: *An Anthology of Three Chosŏn Dynasty Poets* (University of Hawai'i Press, 1991)
- *Sources of Korean Tradition*, Vols. 1–2 (Columbia University Press, 1997–2001)
- *The Record of the Black Dragon Year* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2000)
- *The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Korean Poetry* (Columbia University Press, 2002)

- *A History of Korean Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2003)
- *Oral Literature of Korea* (Jimoondang, 2005)

In this phase, Lee's translations focused primarily on works from the mid-Joseon period. His *A Korean Storyteller's Miscellany* translated Eo Sukkweon's *Paegwan japgi* 稗官雜記 (1573) and examined how anecdotes and miscellanies, situated outside the canonical genres, offer a rich site for exploring lived experience and social critique. He also translated the poetry of Jeong Cheol (1536–1594), Pak Illo (1561–1642), and Yun Seondo (1587–1671) in *Pine River and Lone Peak* (1991), and rendered *Imjin nok* 壬辰錄, a fictionalized narrative of the Japanese invasions, as *The Record of the Black Dragon Year* (2000). During the period, he also participated in collaborative translation projects, *Sources of Korean Tradition* (1997–2001), which introduced key primary texts of Korea and became a foundational resource for Korean studies in the West.

Among Lee's achievements from this period, *A History of Korean Literature* (2003) stands as perhaps his most significant work. This volume represents the first comprehensive attempt to introduce the full genealogy of Korean literature to English-speaking audiences in a systematic manner. Spanning ancient myths and folktales, classical Chinese verse, Buddhist writings, Joseon literati prose, Sino-Korean fiction, oral traditions, and modern and contemporary literature, it foregrounds the diversity of Korean literary expression across languages, genders, and historical contexts. The project was completed in collaboration with scholars including Son Ho-min, Kim Jeong-ran, Kim Heung-gyu, Caroline Soh, Kwon Young-min, and Choi Yun, among others.

The inclusion of both traditional and modern poetic translations in *A History of Korean Literature* not only reflect Lee's research interests but also his personal encounters with many of the writers he translated. In interviews, he reminisced about his conversations with poets such as Jeong Ji-yong (1902–1950), Im Hak-su (1911–1982), Jo Yeon-hyun (1920–1981), and Seo Jeong-ju (1910–2000), as well as novelists including Kim Dong-seok (1913–?) and Kim Dong-ni (1913–1995), all of whom he corresponded with and met in person during his youth. While studying at Seoul National University, he was also in contact with prominent writers such as Yi Tae-jun (1904–?), Im Hwa (1908–1953), Yi Yong-ak (1914–1971), Kim Nam-cheon (1911–1953), and Seol Jeong-sik (1912–1953) (Hong 2007, 384). He frequently recalled his meetings with Jeong Byeong-uk (1922–1982), a former professor of Seoul National

University, who influenced his evolving approach to Korean poetry. These encounters profoundly shaped his sensibility as a translator, who endeavors to recreate each writer's voice, vision, and aesthetic spirit in another language. For instance, in translating the poetry of Jeong Ji-yong, Lee observed:

> He rendered particulars exactly and explored the unlimited implication of words….In astringent remarks, he made his views on poetry clear: " The mystery of poetry is the mystery of language"; "only the poet can infuse blood and breath into language"; "if a poem weeps first, the reader will not have time to contemplate the tears"; "the poet must indefatigably explore his spirit."
>
> (P. Lee 2003, 373–74)

His translation was often grounded in direct personal engagement with the poets themselves, and it sought not merely to convey meaning but to transmit the voice, worldview, and sensibility of the original.

From Text to Voice: Structuralist Approach and Poststructuralist Turn

Peter H. Lee's early works emphasized close textual analysis, focusing on formal structure, linguistic patterns, and symbolic motifs. His structuralist approach served as a means to legitimize Korean poetry within a global scholarly framework. By situating his work within comparative arena, Lee positioned Korean literature as a subject worthy of rigorous academic inquiry at a time when non-Western literary traditions were largely marginalized.

Throughout his early studies and career, he was aware of the cultural dominance of Western literary world. Reflecting on his formative years, Lee recalled in an interview: **"**When I was growing up, it was the dream of every literary youth in Korea, as in Japan, to go to Europe, the cradle of Western civilization" (Ryu 2003, 125–26). Like many Korean elites of his generation, he regarded Europe as the cultural and intellectual center of the world and was deeply captivated by Western literature. Immersing in Western criticisms, he absorbed the influence of Anglo-American literary materials. Simultaneously, he wrestled with a question: how might Korean literature be positioned within a Western-centered intellectual landscape? Whereas scholars in Korea pursued

Korean literature without the need to justify its legitimacy, Lee, working in the United States, was compelled to articulate and defend the very rational for studying Korean literature.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Korea scarcely existed even as an object of Orientalism in Western discourse; it was, in effect, invisible. While Japan and China occupied Western imagination as exotic or culturally distinctive "Others," Korea remained at the periphery of scholarly and popular awareness. Korean studies in the United States was in its formative stage and lacked academic infrastructure that Japanese and Chinese studies had already secured. At the time, Korean literature was seldom regarded as an independent field; it was conceived of as a subcategory of comparative or general literary studies. Additionally, conducting Korean literary research in the United States presented formidable challenges. Access to primary sources was limited, and premodern Korean texts were especially difficult to obtain. Moreover, such research demanded proficiency in literary Chinese and Japanese as well as a solid grounding in philology and classical allusion.

Faced with these institutional obstacles, Lee sought to situate Korean literature within established academic discourse by engaging with structuralism as a strategic intervention to introduce Korean literature to Western academia. By applying structural methods to Korean works, Lee highlighted affinities among Korean, Chinese, Japanese, and Western literary traditions, thereby situating Korean literature as a shared literary heritage. In analyzing the shamanistic functions of "Kujiga" (Song of Kuji 龜旨歌), he noted:

> The ancient Chinese idea of poetry was also essentially similar.…Chinese documents affirm that the same view was held by ancient Korean as to function of poetry: The Korean music, with its bright spirit, helped the growth of all relationships between Heaven and Earth. (P. Lee 1965, 3)

Here, Lee drew upon classical Chinese sources to place Korean poetry within a broader literary context. Such interpretive strategies can be understood as an effort not only to contextualize Korean literature in wider cultural discourses but also to render it legible to global readers through comparative frameworks.

In a 2007 interview, Lee emphasized the importance of establishing "cross points of reference" while introducing Korean literature to foreign audiences:

> In order for Koreans to make Korean literature known, first of all we have to make connections. That means we have to be able to point to some Western works or Chinese and Japanese works as parallels or contrasts, so the readers will say 'Ah hah!" this work belongs to the genre of Montaigne's Essays.
>
> (Hong 2007, 384)

He continued, "If a Korean work just stands by itself, it's hard to attract the attention of Western readers because they won't have time to pick up that book unless it's distinguished in some way, by unique features of those it shares with well-known Western works" (Hong 2007, 385). For Lee, identifying points of similarity across literary traditions functioned as a crucial mechanism for cultivating Western readership. His approach thus pursued the dual objectives of affirming both the distinctiveness and universality of Korean literary expression.

This view is extended into his translation practice. In terms of Lawrence Venuti's theory, Lee's translation aligns more closely with "domestication" than "foreignization" (Venuti 1995, 16–17). Rather than foregrounding linguistic and cultural distance, he often employed accessible and familiar concepts to create a sense of intimacy between the translated text and its intended readership. Yet he also sought to preserve core cultural markers, such as *gisaeng* and *yangban*, through romanization, avoiding the erasure of cultural specificity. His translations, then, can be characterized as a form of "selective" domestication, an effort to construct bridges across cultures while maintaining cultural nuance. Working within a comparative paradigm, Lee strove to reproduce the formal patterns, rhythms, and imagery of traditional verse, while leaving interpretive space for readers to apprehend its aesthetic and cultural resonance (S. Park and Jeong 2002, 456).

Over time, Lee gradually moved beyond his structuralist and East-West comparative orientation toward a deeper inquiry into the aesthetic of Korean poetry. Lee's mid- to late-career research unfolded within an intellectual climate in which structuralism and post-structuralism coexisted. In his earlier years, he prioritized analyzing the internal structures, linguistic systems, and formal mechanism of poetry, following the structuralist criticism. As his scholarship matured, he came to recognize limitations of such text-centered approaches and began to pursue more fluid interpretive tools.

A decisive turning point in this shift was his encounter with Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy*: *The Technologizing the Word* (1982). In this work, Ong

(1982, 31–36) critiques script-centered narrative of progress and argues that speech (orality) and writing (literacy) have shaped human culture through interaction rather than hierarchical succession. Influenced by this notion, Lee began to reconceptualize Korean verse as a living, sonic, and performative tradition rooted in rhythm, melody, and voice. This insight prompted him to challenge the long-standing hierarchy that privileges literacy over orality. He came to view Korean traditional poetry not simply as "written documents," but as "songs," dynamic art forms that integrate performance, vocality, and auditory texture.

This shift is noticeable in his annotated translation of *Chunhyang jeon* (*Tale of Chunhyang*). Near the end of his academic career, at approximately eighty years of age, he published "The Road to Ch'unhyang" in *Azalea*, an essay containing his analysis and translation of *Yeolnyeo Chunhyang sujeolga* (84-page Jeonju edition). There, he argued that Korean poetic traditions, including *pansori*, must be understood as oral cultures that predated and transcended their textual inscription. Accordingly, he sought to recover the affects, rhythms, and voices embedded in the work. Describing the scene where Chunhyang expresses longing for Mongryong after his departure, Lee translated:

> *Pogo chigo pogo chigo* (4/4)
> I yearn to see him, yearn to see him,
> *Ime ŏlgul pogo chigo* (4/4)
> Yearn to see my beloved's face.
> *Tŭtko chigo tŭtko chigo* (4/4)
> I yearn to hear him, yearn to hear him,
> *Ime sori tŭtko chigo* (4/4)
> Yearn to listen to his voice. (P. Lee 2010, 266)

He further observed that the narrator employs ideophones (phenomimes and phonomimes) to convey through sound the state, mood, and actions of human beings as well as natural phenomena. Most of these sonic imitations occur when Chunhyang became the focal point of narration, so that her motions, emotions, and thoughts are rendered through a language of sound (P. Lee 2010, 265–68).

For Lee, Korean poetry is, at its core, constituted as "songs," and its expressive force derives from that melody, rhythm, tempo, and pitch grounded in natural spoken language. Even in genres of *hyangga*, where musical settings are no longer extant, he strives to reconstruct its sonic and performative qualities

as follows:

> The accumulation of appropriate sounds—euphonious soft bilabial nasal, alveo-dental nasal and liquid—creates a languid but sad effect, /d/ recalling an emotion that goes with such English words such as "dread," "dead," and "darkness." The sound values of the original, which resonates with the lamenting voice, cannot be adequately recreated in translation. (P. Lee 2010, 263)

In his analysis of "Je mangmae ga" (Requiem for a Dead Sister), he noted that even among works addressing the same theme of mourning, subtle variations in sound values could either intensify tragic pathos or evoke a sense of transcendence beyond death through acoustic expression. By examining gaps between script and sound, inscription and performance, Lee challenged logocentric assumptions that privilege written form over embodied voice and redefined traditional Korean poetry as a space where absence, fragmentation, and traces of performance become generative forces in the creation of meaning.

Translating Korea

Korean studies in the United States emerged under Cold War imperatives and U.S. government initiatives in area studies, but it was not until the 1980s that the field began to attain a stable institutional foundation. The expansion of Korean immigrant communities and the growing demand for Korean language education fueled an increase in students, academic programs, and trained scholars. Yet, even during this period, institutional support and resources remained limited. Early scholars often built the field through personal dedication, conducting research and cultivating networks at their own expense. Securing university positions also proved difficult, posing significant challenges to Korean studies researchers.

By the 1990s, Korean studies programs were established at major American universities, and a new generation of scholars trained in the United States began to shape the field. During this period, Korean studies developed alongside, and at times in competition with Japanese and Chinese studies, as leading universities gradually incorporated Korea within East Asian studies. These developments played a crucial role in consolidating Korean studies as a solid academic

discipline (Gwak 2012, 211–41).

Since the 2000s, *Hallyu* (the Korean wave) has further heightened international interest in Korean language and culture, significantly raising the field's profile. Whereas Korean cultural terms were once explained through analogies to other cultures, rendering *gimbap* as "Korean sushi" or translating *gisaeng* as "Korean courtesan," recent scholarship increasingly retains Korean terminology. This shift reflects growing recognition of Korean cultural specificity and signals that Korean studies is now understood less as a subordinate branch of East Asian studies than as an autonomous scholarly domain.

These institutional and cultural shifts were accompanied by an expansion of research themes and methodologies. From the 1990s onward, scholars such as Martina Deuchler, James Palais, and Jahyun Kim Haboush advanced studies on Korea's premodern history, literature, and religion (T. Park 2020, 85), broadening the field's focus beyond colonial and postwar concerns to encompass earlier literary and intellectual traditions. Within this evolving scholarly landscape, Peter H. Lee's contributions remain especially significant. Building on his foundational research in premodern Korean literature, Lee served as a bridge through which premodern Korean literature reached new generations of scholars and wider international readerships. Even today, despite the growing availability of Korean literary translations, few anthologies in the field of traditional poetry rival Lee's in depth, scope, or scholarly authority.

Translating Korean poetry requires far more than linguistic substitution; it demands the transmission of symbolic density, polysemy, and indigenous sonic patterns into another language. Lee's translations exemplify his mastery of this complex task. Marked by exceptional linguistic sensitivity and deep textual knowledge, they capture the aesthetics of Korean verse in prose that remains lucid, elegant, and subtly restrained.

Throughout his career, Lee identified himself as a scholar of traditional Korean poetry. Even as Korean studies expanded and scholarly attention shifted toward modern and contemporary literature, he remained committed to classical research and devoted himself to training successive generations of scholars. His work in Korean studies began with a fundamental question: how might the language, forms, and genres of Korean poetry be rendered comprehensible to Western readers? In his early scholarship, he employed formalist tools learned in the West to situate Korean literature within broadly conceived universal frameworks. Over time, however, he moved beyond these models, turning

instead to the distinct linguistic, sonic, and performative dimensions of Korean poetry. His contributions continue to shape the field, offering both a foundation and an invitation to reimagine the study and translation of Korean literature.

As we reflect on Lee's legacy, Isaac Newton's well-known remark comes to mind: "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants" (Turnbull 1959, 416). Yet Lee's scholarly trajectory exemplifies this ethos in a distinctive way. Drawing from the intellectual traditions across East and West, he anchored his work within global literary scholarship while simultaneously advancing the study of Korean literature. Lee did not merely stand on the shoulders of earlier scholars. Through his translations, critical reading, and lifelong dedication to premodern Korean poetry, he himself became a giant, the foundation upon which a later generation of scholars now stands.

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