Digitizing Korean Rare Books at the Starr East Asian Library, UC Berkeley

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Today, I'd like to introduce the significance of a digitizing project for the Korean rare materials stored in the Starr East Asian Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Until now, it has been difficult to assess the full extent of rare materials of this type, even in Korea, because rare materials were scattered all over the country. Thanks to the Korean Old and Rare Collection Information System (KORCIS), built by the National Library of Korea in recent years, it has become possible to check the rare book lists of various organizations in Korea without much difficulty. However, it will take more time and effort to make the list accurate and perfect, and though each organization has tried to create a rare book list, we still need to utilize advanced research, such as 'making detailed description' or 'digitizing work,' to improve these lists.

Outside of Korea, the situation is even more serious, and it is difficult to access Korean rare materials because they are under the control of foreign organizations. In addition, there are no authorized organizations in Korea which can adjust the research work for these materials; until recently, some catalogs compiled by the Institute of Bibliography were all that we had. There are approximately 6,500 volumes from 10 organizations in Japan, France and the United States. Fortunately, the National Library of Korea began to digitize Korean rare materials from the Library of Congress, Harvard University and University of Columbia several years ago.

It is certain that past research contributed to introducing the existence and worth of these materials to Korea. However, this research is not sufficient to satisfy researchers' desire and public curiosity. Therefore, we have to provide more details about these materials along with actual images. In addition, as these materials belong to foreign organizations, this work should be progressed by authorized organizations.

In this situation, RIKS of Korea University began a research project for overseas materials under the auspices of the Korean government in November 2008. The goal of this project includes cataloging, creating basic and detailed descriptions, and digitization, and we have decided to research the Korean rare book collection of EAL at U.C. Berkeley for the following reasons:

First, there are more than 2,500 titles of Korean rare books at U.C. Berkeley, one of the largest overseas collections in quantity.

Second, there are a number of unique materials in the collection, most of them rare even in Korea.

Third, there are a number of meaningful materials in the collection, and though we may have similar ones in Korea, these materials can be used for comparison.

Fourth, there are a number of manuscripts which are presumed to be written in the original writer's own handwriting, making them rare and valuable.

And more than 20 academic articles discussed the value of this collection directly and indirectly. The first catalog of this collection was published by the Institute of Bibliography in 1995. However, it only included half of the entire holdings. After these findings, RIKS researched the rest of the collection and published a catalog last year. The online system was built as well, so we can now view the complete list. Consequently, we have already completed the basic research for this project.

At present, RIKS finds a common cause with EAL of U.C. Berkeley and the Internet Archive in working to digitize these materials. This work includes providing a basic description, detailed description and digitization of each piece. We expect access to Korean rare materials to become easier through this process, transcending time and space through the meaning of this work. In addition, we expect to reveal the precise value and significance of this collection.

And we are planning to research the major collections from Japan and Russia in the near future with this experience. We know that it is important to maintain the mutually beneficial cooperative relationship with other organizations like National Library.

Thank you all for your time and consideration. Next, we will give a separate presentation from Mr. Baek about the outline and detail of this project. Thank you.