

Korean Special Collection Digitizing Project in the University of Hawai'i (UH) Library, in collaboration with the National Institute of Korean History

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Chungch'uwŏn

The Chungch'uwŏn was established in 1894 and lasted until the Japanese colonial period in Korea. Before the Japan-Korea Annexation, it played a role similar to that of the early parliament. During the Japanese colonial period, it served as an advisory body to the Governor-General of Korea.

The Chungch'uwŏn Collection : A Window into Korea's Colonial Past

Historical Significance

The Chungch'uwŏn was a key institution during Japan's colonial rule over Korea (1910–1945), responsible for gathering extensive data on:

- Customs and Folklore
 - Political and Social Systems
 - Lifestyles and History
- Officials compiled and submitted reports to Chungch'uwŏn, forming a vast repository of information on Korean society.

Research & Academic Value

The Chungch'uwŏn Collection remains an invaluable historical resource, offering critical insights into:

- Korea under Japanese colonial rule
- History, cultural studies, and Korean

National Institute of Korean History (NIKH) & Database of Korean History

Mission & Purpose

The National Institute of Korean History (NIKH) is a South Korean government agency dedicated to:

- Investigating, collecting, and preserving historical materials.
- Compiling and facilitating Korean history research.
- Enhancing public historical awareness.



All collected materials are freely available to the public through the Database of Korean History.

Open Access Resource

Expanding Access to Korean History

Since the 2000s, NIKH has expanded efforts to collect overseas Korean history materials, building an extensive archive of modern and contemporary historical documents.

Project Timeline

November 2022

The research Compilation and Digitalization Department of NIKH visited UH Library to investigate the state of the Chungch'uwŏn Collection.

January 2023

The UH Library Preservation Department conducted the first Condition Assessment. The assessment concluded that the collection's condition was not suitable for shipping to NIKH for digitization. Additionally, the evaluation determined the appropriate treatment category based on the extent of the damage.

February 2023

The condition report from the Preservation Department was submitted to the UH and NIKH project team.

July 2023

UH Library invited conservation specialists from NIKH and Gangoji Institute for Research on Culture Property, Japan, to train UH Library conservators in traditional East Asian paper conservation.

October 2023

The University Librarian of the University of Hawaii Library visits NIKH's headquarters in Gwacheon, Korea, to sign an MOA.

November 2023-October 2024

UH Library digitized the Chungch'uwŏn collection in-house. The digital files and metadata are shared in batches.

June 2024

UH Library created and allocated a 6TB dark archive to the Asia Collection department, for the permanent preservation of digital materials including the Chungch'uwŏn collection. NIKH's digitized Chungch'uwŏn collection (1069 volumes) is shared with the UH Library.

October 2024

UH Library finished the digitization of the entire collection.

January 2025

UH Library uploaded the entire collection in their digital depository.

External Challenges

KONEPS: South Korea's E-Procurement System

In South Korea, public institutions use KONEPS (Korea On-line E-Procurement System, 나라장터) for purchasing and contract settlements.

- Competitive bidding is the standard requirement
- Registration required: -Business Registration Certificate -Bid Bond & Supplier's Certificate

Challenges and Solutions	
Issue	UH Library, a U.S.-based institution, faced complex and time-consuming KONEPS procedures
Solution	Regulations were reviewed, and contracts under 20 million KRW were found exempt from KONEPS
Result	A direct contract between UH Library and NIKH was pursued, bypassing the bidding process

MOA and Legal Complexities

- Legal terminology differences between Korea & the U.S.
- Translation nuances impacting agreement interpretation.
- Scope of responsibility differences for UH Library.

UH Policy Challenge:

- All international MOAs must be signed by the UH President, not individual departments.
- Solution: The library worked closely with the UH administration to justify the project and coordinate with NIKH.

Communication Barriers in Korean Government Agencies

Frequent personnel rotations in Korean government agencies (every 1-2 years) meant that the original NIKH team that initiated discussions was not the team that executed the project. The new team didn't know the project's history, and required additional time to address miscommunications due to incomplete knowledge transfer.

Technical Challenge: Which Format Do We Want?

UH Library	NIKH	Proposed Solution: IIIF Integration
Pyramid TIFFs (~100MB per file)	JPEG files (~10MB per file)	The UH Library Digital Lab proposed utilizing the International Image Interoperability Framework (IIIF) to:
Library focused on long-term digital preservation and ensuring high-resolution access to the collection	Prioritized translation and research, accepting downscaled JPEGs as long as text legibility remained intact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide high-quality digital images at scale. • Share IIIF manifest URLs with NIKH, allowing them to extract images as needed.
		However, NIKH hesitated to adopt this method due to unfamiliarity with IIIF-based image retrieval.

Conclusion & Takeaways

Project Achievements

- 1,496 volumes digitized and accessible on the eVols platform.
- Full collection list available via the Korean Collection LibGuides.
- Actively utilized by researchers and expected to support future scholarship.

International Collaboration and Funding Success

- Partnership with Korea enhanced project quality through shared resources and expertise.
 - Strengthened international networks for future collaborations.
- Secured funding support, establishing a model for future digitization projects.

Innovation and Process Improvements in the Library

- Introduced new workflows, including the bidding system streamlining operations.
- Provided hands-on experience with East Asian book conservation techniques.
- Deepened cross-departmental understanding of library functions.

Takeaway

The Chungch'uwŏn Digitization Project is a benchmark for future collaborations—demonstrating the power of teamwork, innovation, and international partnership in library digitization efforts.

Internal Challenges

The Chungch'uwŏn Digitization Project required seamless collaboration between public service librarians, IT specialists, and book/paper conservators at the University of Hawai'i At Mānoa Library. To preserve and digitize a historically significant collection within a strict two-year timeline.

Pre-processing (Treating 293 volumes) → Digitizing (Entire collection—418 volumes, 99,349 images in total) → Post-processing (Reboxing 158 volumes)

(vol. 246). Light blue indicates severe deterioration with losses.

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Project Priorities and Workflow Integration	Time Constraints and Resource Allocation	Impact on Digitization	Preservation Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Preservation Department and Digital Lab are among the busiest units in the library. • The first step was submitting the Chungch'uwŏn collection's 'first row' for treatment. 	<p>With ongoing commitments, departments worried about how this project would fit into existing workloads.</p>	<p>Without proper preservation treatments, digitization would be riskier and slower. We adjusted expectations while maintaining digitization quality standards.</p>	<p>Conservators lacked experience with East Asian traditional paper (e.g., Washi) and its binding style. They adjusted treatment methods to balance conservation needs with digitization goals.</p>

Overcoming

Development of an IIIF JPEG Downloader

UH Library developed a web-based, simplification program that allows NIKH to copy and paste IIIF manifest URLs to download images in JPEG format. This enabled both institutions to acquire the results in their preferred formats while ensuring interoperability.

East Asian paper conservation workshop with invited specialists

UH Library hosted a workshop, inviting paper conservators at NIKH and Gangoji Institute for Research on Culture Property, from Korea and Japan, respectively, who have expertise on papers like the Chungch'uwŏn collection.

Efforts to Maintain Ongoing Coordination

- A **monthly meeting** with all parties ensured constant coordination. UH Library held these meetings to adjust schedules and establish proper treatment methods. Open discussions were facilitated to address each department's progress and challenges, allowing for collaborative problem-solving.
 - A **Shared Master Inventory** was created and shared to track each item's condition, including details such as the extent of damage, whether pre- or post-treatment by the Preservation Department was applied, digitization progress, and holding location information.
 - This ongoing effort of touch also fostered a deeper understanding of colleagues' workflows and specialized expertise within the same institution.
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Ensuring Proficiency in Material Capturing

The library provided hands-on training for students capturing materials in the digital lab. Experienced student workers at the Digital Lab familiar with digitization machines had to be retrained specifically to capture and handle Chungch'uwŏn materials.