

# Korean Studies in the United States

## Origins, Development and Prospects



# Overview of Talk

- My Personal Search for a Korean Studies Program
- Overview of the Growth of Korean Studies in the U.S.
- Backgrounds of Koreanists & the Contexts in Which They Have Worked
- Prospects for Korean Studies in the Coming Years

# Going to Korea

- In a Quandary
  - Dropped out of Northern Arizona University, facing the draft in 1965
  - Opted to enlist with hopes of attending the Defense Language Institute
  - Chosen for the 37-week Korean language course
- Off to Korea
  - Sent to Korea in 1966
  - Assigned to a unit by the DMZ
- My Fascination with Korea
  - Intrigued by Korean society and culture
  - Extended my stay in Korea until discharged from active duty in 1968

# Searching for a Korean Studies Program

- Decided to study more about Korea
- Limited options in the U.S.
  - Unlike Japan & China, almost no schools with undergraduate programs
  - A handful of universities with introductory courses in Korean language
  - Some schools with single course offerings in history or literature
- Chose to study in Korea
  - After my discharge, went back to Korea to improve my language skills
  - Accepted as a transfer student at Korea University in 1970
  - Got much help from my fellow students during my first year there
  - With encouragement from my teachers, opted for graduate study in U.S.
- Did an M.A. at the Univ. of Hawaii, PhD at Univ. of Washington

# My Alma Mater



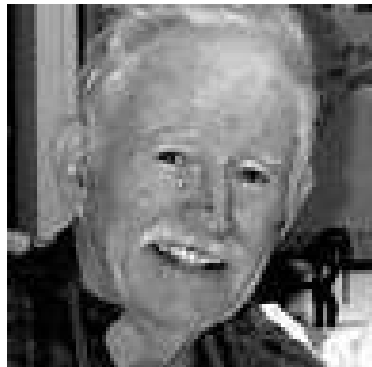
# Korean Studies in the U.S.: The Early Years

- The First Americans with scholarly interests
  - Missionaries and journalists in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century
    - Language, culture and religion
    - Joined with Canadian and British to form the RAS Korea Branch
    - Published annual Transactions of the Transactions of the RAS Korea Branch
  - Their interests did not lead to Korean Studies in U.S. colleges & universities
- The Establishment of the First Korean Studies Programs in the U.S.
  - 1950s
    - After the Korean War
    - Professorships at Harvard, UC Berkeley, University of Washington
  - 1960s: Hawaii, Columbia and BYU hired Koreanists
  - Typically one professor in humanities & in some cases a language teacher
  - Also a handful of political scientists at various colleges & universities
  - Training for a few graduate students: Harvard, UC Berkeley, Washington
- Library Holdings: Harvard, Berkeley, Washington, Columbia, LOC

# The Pioneers:



Doo Soo Suh .  
Columbia, Harvard,  
Washington



Michael Rogers  
UC Berkeley



Edward Wagner.  
Harvard



Peter Lee,  
Columbia, Hawaii, UCLA

# Gradual Growth in the 1970s & 1980s

- Schools adding new faculty
  - Harvard, Washington a few
  - Hawaii many in various disciplines
- Creation of new programs
  - Univ. of Southern California, Illinois, Indiana, UCLA, Stony Brook, Chicago, Kansas
  - All developing library holdings on Korea
- Establishment of Centers for Korean Studies
  - First U.S. Center for Korean Studies at Hawaii, 1972
  - Followed by Berkeley, Harvard, Columbia
- Korean government support:
  - Hawaii's Center for Korean Studies
  - Some funding for research trips to Korea



# Two Giants of the Second Generation



James Palais, Washington



Gari Ledyard, Columbia

# University of Hawaii Center for Korean Studies



# Period of Rapid Growth: 1990s-now

- Growth at existing programs: Harvard, UCLA, Indiana, Chicago, USC
- New Programs ( 2 or more faculty)
  - East: Penn, George Mason, GWU, Maryland, Binghamton, Buffalo, Princeton, Yale
  - Midwest: Michigan, Ohio State, Wisconsin
  - South: Georgia, Duke, Texas, Emory
  - West. Stanford, UC San Diego, UC Irvine, Arizona State, Arizona, Claremont Colleges
- Korea courses at many state and private universities and colleges
- New Language Programs – over 100 hundred schools, inc. community colleges
- New Centers for Korean Studies
  - West: UCLA, Cal State LA, UC Irvine, Washington, Stanford
  - East: Penn, George Mason, GWU, Johns Hopkins
  - Midwest: Michigan, Ohio State, University of Detroit (North Korean Studies)
- Major schools for PhD training
  - Harvard, Columbia, Hawaii, UCLA, Washington, Chicago, Michigan, Stanford

# Factors Behind Rapid Growth

- South Korea's emergence as an industrial power
  - By 1980s: Export of automobiles, steel, ships
  - From 1990s: High tech
- Korean-American student demand for courses on Korea
- Popularity of Korean popular culture
  - End of military rule and censorship led to revival of popular culture
  - In 1990s, Korean dramas and films in China, Japan, Southeast Asia
  - In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, spread throughout world and K-pop emerges
- Role of Korean government and universities
  - From 1990s, government active in promoting Korean Studies worldwide
  - Korea Foundation & Academy of Korean Studies
    - Established Professorships, and created "Hub Universities" in various countries
    - Provided scholarships for students, research funding for faculty
    - Provided substantial resources for libraries
  - Korean universities establish international programs for foreign students

# Poster for “Winter Sonata” drama in Japan



# Backgrounds & Research of Koreanists in Cold War Era

- 1950s and 1960s
  - A few scholars from Korea teaching literature, language, pre-modern history
  - Americans with military and missionary backgrounds focusing on pre-modern Korea
    - Some examining why Korea, with its long history, failed to modernize on its own
    - Others more interested in aspects of traditional Korean culture and religion
- 1970s-1980s
  - Still some military and missionary, a few Korean-Americans, influx from Peace Corps
  - Political Science scholars, several from Korea, getting training in U.S.
    - International Relations in late 19<sup>th</sup> century
    - South Korean politics
    - Korean War and North Korea
  - History, Confucianism, Women's studies, shamanism
    - Pre-modern history, Confucian thought
    - Modern: Colonial period history, recent Korean economic development
    - Widening of disciplines: Anthropology, sociology, linguistics, others

# Backgrounds & Research of Post-Cold War Koreanists

- Backgrounds
  - Soldiers, missionaries now just a trickle, no more Peace Corps volunteers
  - Many Korean-Americans and Koreans trained in U.S.
  - Others intrigued by Korea; not just Americans but others
- New theoretical trends: Post-modernism, Post-colonialism
- Research and teaching interests
- Shift from pre-modern to modern/contemporary in humanities
  - Critical examination of South Korean authoritarian regimes
  - Critical examination of U.S. and Korea
  - Inter-Korean relations
  - Studies of North Korean culture
  - Growing interest in marginalized groups
  - New disciplines: popular culture, ethnomusicology, art history
- Much collaboration with scholars in Korea
- A Field Radically Different from Cold War Era

# Tentative Thoughts on the Coming Years

- The Two Koreas
  - South Korea now a developed nation: economically, politically, culturally
  - North Korea has many problems but it is now a nuclear power
- Korean Studies now established in the U.S.
- Issues of Concern
  - Korea in Northeast Asia
    - Possibility of a new war in Korea
    - Problematic relations with Japan: historical and territorial
    - Problematic relations with China: historical, territorial, economic, fears of hegemony
  - Korea in the changing world order
    - South Korea a beneficiary of globalization
    - Spreading backlash against globalization as seen in rightwing populism in Europe, U.S.
    - Possible trade wars, nationalist reactions to outside cultural influences
- But Koreans are adroit and resilient, have overcome many difficulties
- Cautiously confident that Korea & Korean Studies will endure and prosper