

The Transnational (Re)Turn of Korean Studies

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What new kinds of knowledge are we to envision when an academic trend or a body of scholarship is established with the purpose of studying the culture, history, traditions, and, above all, language, of another nation? Such knowledge would be obtained through the crossing of national boundaries, minimally involving actual physical travel on the part of the scholar, the translation and transmission of printed or electronic data, or combinations of both. Such knowledge would involve skepticism, as well as the recognition of national boundaries. Most importantly, it would call for attentiveness in relation to the uneven power relations between the nations involved. As such, in common with many other intellectual endeavors, one that involves the study of another nation cannot avoid a process of engaging in political reflection and consciousness that is transnationally traversed. It is with this realization in mind that I begin this short essay on rethinking Korean Studies in the US.

Korean Studies in the US began as a transnational endeavor. Its embryonic formation – which I would date to the very beginning of the twentieth century – reflected transnational interactions between nations and individuals, objectives and commitments, and, above all, ideals and realities. The 1980s stand out as an anomalous period in the historic development of this field, exhibiting a diametrically opposite shift away from transnational elements toward an inward-looking focus on Korea itself, and, more precisely, South Korea – South Korea itself being viewed from a particular perspective at that. By this, I mean to argue that while Korean Studies came to have a primary focus on various aspects of the history and culture of South Korea during this period, it was caught up in a particular type of partiality that reflected the grip of the then military dictatorship and the history of strong American military involvement on the peninsula, a state of affairs that was inevitably reflected in the choice of research topics and the parameters used by scholars. In this century, Korean Studies in the US faces new possibilities, and is exhibiting signs of an outward shift toward a focus on transnational and global flows of people, ideas, and disciplines. At the same time, it has the potential to undo the existing boundaries between Korean and Korean American Studies on the one hand and between South

Korean Studies and North Korean Studies on the other. While admittedly not exhaustive, this short article is an attempt to capture this momentum.

1. In the Beginning

The process by which Korean Studies came into being was not as clear as its name might suggest. Korea was already one of the early objects of study in a relatively unknown corner of nineteenth century American anthropology, for example (Oppenheim 2016). Its coast and ports were surveyed and documented for strategic purposes by the US Navy during the late nineteenth century (Buckingham, Foulk, & McLean 1883). Presbyterian medical missionaries, notably Horace Newton Allen, left a few key texts relating to Korean missions, folk tales, and other aspects of Korean life and culture (Allen 1889, 1908). Does the existence of such forms of documentation and books prove the existence of Korean Studies? Probably not. But in addition to all the above, the presence of like-minded scholars possessing a similar goal, that of helping make Korea better understood in the US, despite the fact that they did not have teaching or research positions at institutions of higher education in the US, may allow us to assert that a form of proto-Korean Studies was on the rise, leading us to roughly identify its birth at the very beginning of the twentieth century.

What I call proto Korean Studies in the US began when a small and diverse group of Koreans arrived in the US with a variety of purposes in mind. For example, in 1903, 7,500 men and women landed in Hawaii as plantation workers (Patterson 2001). Many were motivated to travel to the US by their Christian – predominantly Protestant – faith. Others were students planning to attend various institutions of higher learning. By and large, however, the numbers were small when compared to the level of Chinese migration to California or Japanese migration to Hawaii. Pyong Gap Min estimates that approximately two thousand Koreans arrived in Hawaii and California between the years 1910 and 1926, a sizable proportion so-called “picture brides” for the bachelor immigrants who had arrived earlier as plantation workers (Min 2005: 231).

Given Japan’s 1910 annexation of Korea and the strong outrage that Korean intellectuals felt toward this development, it is not surprising that Korean intellectual activities in the US prior to 1945 were characterized by a desire to study conditions in Korea under Japanese colonial rule

on one hand and a commitment to Korea's independence on the other. Notable individuals included Ahn Chang Ho, Yong-man Park, and Syngman Rhee. All three came to the US seeking a higher education, and all were equally passionate patriots, albeit in different ways. Through their intellectual endeavors, they aimed to appeal to American opinion leaders with regard to Korea's plight, either via church organizations or the printed media. They also directly applied the knowledge they had acquired at US institutions of higher education to the Korean independence movement. As such, they were, albeit in a limited sense, public intellectuals and scholar activists. As part of his ongoing engagement with the anti-Japanese resistance movement, Ahn frequently traveled to China and Korea. He made his last journey in 1926. He was never to return to the US, to which he had moved more than twenty years earlier. Arrested by Japanese colonial authorities on the basis of his anti-Japanese activism, he died in Korea in 1938 as a result of an illness contracted during his imprisonment. Park, who studied military science at the University of Nebraska, believed that young Korean men should receive a military education under the conviction that superior military might would enable Korea to regain its independence from Japan. For a number of years, he operated a private Korean military academy in Nebraska. He was eventually forced out of the Korean American community by a group led by his co-activist and rival, Syngman Rhee. Having joined the US military expedition against the Bolsheviks in Siberia, Park was assassinated by a Korean communist in Beijing in 1928 (Pai 1989). Syngman Rhee studied political science at Princeton University and played a leading role in encouraging the church-based Korean expatriate community on the US mainland and in Hawaii to sustain its efforts to keep the topic of Korean independence on the social radar via the printed media, albeit on a small scale. Rhee eventually returned to (South) Korea to become the first president of the Republic of Korea.

Because of the very fact that Korea was under Japanese rule, a foreign nation, the way in which knowledge related to Korea was sought out by early Korean intellectuals in the US was inevitably transnational in nature, as it took place within the framework of a desire to extricate Korea from Japanese colonial rule, with the US intellectual establishment and public opinion as instrumental bases to work with in the achievement of this goal, however naïve and ineffective such attempts may have been. The physical arena of their political activities and intellectual explorations encompassed a broad expanse of international terrain, including Korea, Japan, China, the Russian Far East, the US – even Siberia, in the case of Park. Thus, the scholarly endeavors of the early Korean intellectuals in the US began on a transnational footing, albeit in an unsystematic way, involving colonial relations, trans-border journeys, and trans-cultural engagements.

Interestingly, this state of affairs contrasted starkly with that of Korean colonial intellectuals studying in Japan, Korea's colonial metropolis, or those engaged in Korea and other Japan's colonial territories, the well-known examples of which being Yi Gwang-su and Choi Nam-seon. Even though these individuals may have started off as anti-Japanese or at some point in life resisted the Japanese rule, they tended to end up being supporters of Japan's effort for colonial expansion in East Asia. More often than not working under severe forms of surveillance and a firm authoritarian grip, they often became controversial sympathizers and even admirers of Japan (though in a much more complex sense than can be outlined here), this, too, stemming from their patriotic desire to achieve the "advancement" of Korea by following in the footsteps of Japan, joining the latter nation in its progress. Such was in contrast with the staunchly and consistently anti-Japanese stance held by the US-based diasporic Korean intellectuals. Also, away from the intellectual milieu, in international labor unionism and the Comintern-led Communist movement in Japan, Korean leaders displayed strong levels of anti-colonial and pro-independence commitment (see Kawashima 2009).

In parallel with the above, as Robert Oppenheim masterfully details in his recent book, there was a small but significant contingent of American anthropologists that was interested in Korea, with at least one, Frederick Starr, conducting substantial ethnographic fieldwork in Korea (Oppenheim 2016: Ch.5). These early research endeavors were part of the old pattern of anthropological practice whereby Korea, side by side with other examples of "primitive" cultures, was classified in the "other" category or the category of "our past." Many of these early researchers were led by a teleological drive to connect Korea with the already-established ethnological lineage. However, precisely because of this rather misplaced premise, Korea was placed in close connection to other ethnological groups in comparative terms. This, in some ironic ways, resulted in an approach that looked at Korea transnationally or trans-continently, even, rather than nationally. By and large, the reality of Korea having been part of the Japanese Empire led to the presumption that there was little need to consider Korea as something worthy of examination on its own, but mainly as an appendix or lesser contingent of Japan. Outside the US, in a development typical of the colonial approach to colonized territory, Japanese archaeologists, ethnologists, historians, linguists, and folklorists approached Korea with ambivalence: Sometimes, they were too hasty in establishing Korea's primordial ties with Japan, while at other times, they would Orientalize Korea, in the sense of the term discussed by Edward Said (1979), deeming its culture to be a lesser and inferior than that of Japan, although there are many examples of complex deviations that fall between these two sides, including the work of Akiba Takashi, anthropologist at Keijō Imperial University (today's Seoul National University), and that of Yanagi Sōetsu relating to *mingei* (popular arts and crafts) and the appreciation of the beauty of Korean native culture (see Walraven 1999; Brandt 2007).

2. South Korean Studies

As Charles Armstrong succinctly puts it, it was not until after World War II that “the study of Korea entered the American academy (Armstrong 2014: 29).” The act of saying so, in itself, implies the existence of a few prior assumptions. Firstly, that the politically-motivated scholarship of early Korean scholar-exiles in the US did not even count in the minds of members of postwar American academe. Secondly, that it was only through the defeat of Japan and its occupation by the US that this entity called “Korea” was able to emerge, precariously, on the horizons of that academe. Thirdly, and related to the second point, Korea would be relegated to second or third place among East Asian nations (including China and Japan), as we shall see below.

The slow and limited manner in which Korean Studies in the US developed can be attributed, in large measure, to a lack of interest and understanding on the part of the government, the military, and academic institutions, particularly when compared with the state of affairs concerning the study of Japan and, to a lesser extent, China. The extent of the level of disengagement can be seen through a comparison of the way the postwar US military occupations of Japan and Korea were, respectively, conducted. While the occupation of Japan involved not only military forces, but also thousands of US civilians who arrived by and large bearing the wholesome intention of making Japan into a “better” place, the disproportionately heavy military presence in the case of Korea was accentuated by a top-down command structure, a lack of knowledge about Korea’s history and culture, and a lack of willingness to learn about Korea on the part of those in charge. In contrast with the occupation of Japan, those involved in the US military occupation of Korea did not see any value in encouraging broader participation by Koreans in the nation-building process. No manual – indeed, no form of intellectual guidance – existed to assist occupation personnel understand Korean culture, again contrasting with the situation in Japan. During WWII, and especially after Pearl Harbor, the US government and military intelligence had poured resources into efforts to gain a deeper understanding of Japanese culture. Japanese families being held in internment camps in the US were observed and studied as if they were laboratory specimens by many experts including anthropologists, psychologists, and so on (Ryang 2004: Ch.1). Most important is a research conducted by anthropologist Ruth Benedict under the auspices of the Office of War Information, the results later published in book form under the title *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (1946). This book, which explained the Japanese culture not in

terms of some pseudo-pathology or behaviorism (as had been done previously) but in terms of Japan's unique cultural logic stemming from the Emperor worship, became a must-read textbook for postwar occupation personnel stationed in Japan. Against the backdrop of rising Cold War tensions and despite the dehumanizing treatment of the US citizens of Japanese heritage during the war, the US occupation of Japan was, by and large, a well organized operation, characterized by extensive cooperation between Americans and Japanese (at least, at the level of the authorities). In contrast, by the time that the Korean War broke out, Korea was, in the minds of members of the US establishment, an incorrigible and trouble-laden place inhabited by a people who were inferior on all counts to the Japanese. As such, Korea was only useful as a buffer state to protect the superior US ally, Japan, from the communist threat.

Most of the postwar Korean Studies scholars in the US higher education system, including Edward Wagner and James Palais, had backgrounds associated with the military occupation (Armstrong 2014: 30). It was these scholars who started what were to become major centers for Korean Studies in the US, both in terms of their scholarly production and their production of younger scholars—under Wagner in Harvard University, and under Palais in the University of Washington. The early postwar Korean Studies scholars began their work in the field of history, both premodern (Wagner 1974) and colonial (Palais 1975). This was understandable, given that hardly any scholarly works on Korea had been produced at institutions of higher learning in the US prior to Wagner and Palais, and that, therefore, a certain urgency existed to fill the utter paucity of studies concerning the peninsula. However, the problem was that the partitioning of Korea following the end of the period of Japanese colonial rule meant that envisioning Korean Studies as a field whose primary focus was pre-modern and colonial history could not adequately address the complex reality faced by Korea during the 1960s and 1970s. Following the bloody Korean War (1950-53) and deeply mired in a tense atmosphere of Cold War confrontation, both North Korea and South Korea insisted on their respective singular claims to national authenticity while denouncing the other as a puppet of the respective Cold War superpower. As North Korea receded behind the Iron Curtain, and with further impetus added by the continuing large-scale presence of US military forces in South Korea, the latter nation rapidly became the sole object of Korean Studies in the US. This process was also conditioned by the agenda of the military regime in South Korea, itself possessing strong opinions as to what should and should not be studied and talked about, both within academe and beyond. One good example of such practice would be the military dictatorship's prohibition of any form of research or literary production related to the April 3 uprising (1948-1949) on Jeju Island and its aftermath, which included massacres and mass executions of thousands of innocent islanders, this uprising having been labeled by authorities as a communist-instigated incident. Even faint demonstrations of sympathy toward the motives of the uprising would have led to

the risk of imprisonment under (still existing) anti-communist legislation in the country and the surviving families of the massacre victims had to endure the state-imposed silence for five decades. For, it has only been during the last few years – that is to say, more than fifty years after the events in question – that scholarly research and literary and artistic production related to the devastation suffered by the people of Jeju at the hands of the South Korean military have come to be permitted (Ryang 2013). For decades, academic research related to Jeju Island was limited to apolitical themes, such as traditional heritage, shamanism, women's work as divers, and folklore. Likewise, the subjects and scope of academic research on Korea relying on sources available within South Korea needs to be understood against the backdrop of the constraining effects of the anti-communist stance displayed by the South Korean state, with researchers channeled to operate within parameters that the South Korean government deemed acceptable.

The post-Wagner/Palais generation of Korean Studies scholars, representative examples of which include Bruce Cumings, Carter Eckert, Michael Robinson, Laurel Kendall, Clark Sorensen, and John Duncan (all of whom have taught at various reputable institutions, either in full-time or adjunct roles), were all Peace Corps participants who served in Korea prior to studying in graduate programs. It was under their leadership that Korean Studies in the US witnessed a full blossoming (e.g. Cumings 1981, 1991; Kendall 1988; Robinson 1988; Eckert 1991; Sorensen 1988; Duncan 2000). Helped by the absence of a philological tradition of Korean language study in the US, these scholars were also pioneers in building disciplinary diversity in and around Korean Studies including anthropology, history, and literature, while also becoming standard bearers for the study of Korea in the US. While the scale of academic production was admittedly meager when compared to that of Japanese Studies in the US during the same period, it is important to emphasize here that Korean Studies in the US during the 1980s exhibited marked robustness when compared with the state of affairs of Korean Studies in other Anglophone nations, such as Britain and Australia, during the same period.

With the exception of Cumings' research on the origins of the Korean War (see below), I categorize research produced by the former Peace Corps scholars during the 1980s as "South Korean Studies." I regard Cumings as an exception, due to the fact that he utilized hitherto untapped North Korean archives that had been confiscated by the US military during the Korean War and stored in the National Archives. In particular, his shift away from denouncing North Korea as the provocative party in the war (and hence solely responsible for it) toward a more complex and nuanced approach that viewed both parties (North and South) as having complicity in creating armed conflict and political tension was not particularly welcomed by the

South Korean government. Nevertheless, he was able to influence the direction of historical research related to the Korean War in an unprecedented way due to the richness of the empirical data that he examined and the clear and succinct manner in which he presented his analysis. As such, his work gained a reception extending far beyond the narrow confines of the Korean Studies circle.

I would like to emphasize that my categorization of the work of other authors under the title of South Korean Studies is not intended to cast a negative light on their work and contributions. Rather, I am simply characterizing their work produced during this period as having been carried out under a particular set of circumstances, involving themes considered uncontroversial by the South Korean government, while more sensitive topics, such as human rights, atrocities committed by the military dictatorship, and the terrible price paid by the weak and the poor in the achievement of industrial development, did not come under critical examination by academic authors. I must also stress that, in saying this, I have no intention whatsoever of implying that these scholars collaborated, either intentionally or unintentionally, with the South Korean military dictatorships that were then in power, or that they were not indignant at the wrongdoings of the autocratic government. I am, rather, attempting to grasp the historical structure that supported scholarly production about Korea in the US during a period marked, by and large, by a contrived effort to operate within the restrictive parameters imposed by the South Korean military dictatorship. Whether or not individual scholars were conscious of this is beside my point. Besides, the productivity of these scholars survived the end of the military dictatorship. Thus, it should be clear that my classification is temporally confined to the 1980s, and does not apply to individual examples of scholarship that outlasted this period.

The emergence of Korean Studies in the form of South Korean Studies in the US during the 1980s needs to be understood against the backdrop of the Cold War on one hand and the enduring military dictatorship in South Korea on the other. This can be better understood if we contrast the respective growth of Korean Studies and Japanese Studies in US academe during the same period. In line with the Department of State's country study model, area studies flourished during the Cold War period, allocations of funding being made toward the study of the languages, histories, and cultures of strategically important regions. While South Korea was not a Cold War enemy of the US, Korean Studies benefitted from the overall boom in area studies due to its government's aggressive anti-communist stance and the heavy military investment on the part of the US against the backdrop of South Korea's ongoing confrontation

with North Korea. While also influenced by Cold War power relations, the development of Japanese Studies in the US, on the other hand, specifically reflected Japan's emergence as a leading global economic power during the 1980s, this development in turn promoting scholarly inquiry into Japanese-style management and/or Japan's unique culture and pattern of industrialization. In Japan itself, such forms of inquiry were classed under the umbrella term, *nihonjinron*, variously translated as "study of the Japanese," "theory of the Japanese people," or, more comprehensively, "study of Japanese cultural uniqueness." Interestingly, many scholars sought its intellectual origins in Ruth Benedict's *Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. Inputs from Japan-grown and Japan-based researchers, such as cultural anthropologist Chie Nakane and psychologist Takeo Doi, were avidly sought after by US scholars of Japan in the social scientific and humanistic disciplines (Nakane 1972, Doi 1973; see also Vogel 1980). This mutual engagement between US and Japanese intellectuals was accompanied by interesting effects, including moves by left-leaning Anglophone scholars to accept Japan's own leftist critique of dehumanizing industrialization, and Japan's amnesia in relation to its colonial history as well as atrocities and injustices committed by Japan during the Pacific War. For example, work carried out during the 1980s by Honda Katsuichi, a stalwart critic of Japan's prewar colonial aggression in Asia (including the Nanjing massacre of 1937) as well as US atrocities in Vietnam and elsewhere, reached the US during the early 1990s via the translations and editorial work of John Lie, facilitating an academic critique in the US of contemporary Japanese politics and Japan's historical amnesia (Lie 1993). Meanwhile, a fierce critique of the oppressive and dehumanizing assembly-line conditions in Japan during the era of industrialization, where excessively long hours became the norm, reached English-language readers via the work of Satoshi Kamata, for example (Kamata 1983).

By way of contrast, Korean Studies in the US during the 1980s, produced hardly any outright critiques of the South Korean government and its suppression of opposition forces, nor of big businesses and its ongoing and brutal exploitation of the poor in collaboration with the government. Admittedly, it may be argued that this state of affairs might be more a reflection of the suppression of academic freedom in South Korea itself than a reflection of a lack of interest among US Korean Studies scholars. Japan entered a long and generally peaceful period of high economic growth after the social turmoil of the late 1960s, while South Korea remained under the iron grip of a succession of military regimes from the early 1960s through the late 1980s, hard-core military strongmen showing no hesitation in suppressing opposition by resorting to imprisonment, torture, abduction, and murder. It is, therefore, not surprising that there were significant differences in the way in which these two disciplines developed in the US. Nevertheless, the fact remains that an explicit critique of the South Korean establishment had to wait another decade. An example of which may include the work of Katharine Moon, whose

critique about prostitution involving the US military and the collaboration of the Korean government are revealed in *Sex Among Allies*. The fieldwork for this book was conducted during the 1990s, following the replacement of the brutal military dictator Chun Doo-hwan with the center-right-leaning Roh Tae-woo in February 1988 (Moon 1997). Similarly, Nancy Abelmann's seminal work, one of the first books to capture Korean social movements during the era of the military dictatorship, was published in 1996, during the first civilian administration in South Korea, that of Kim Young Sam (1993-96) (Abelmann 1996). It was not until the mid-1990s that the critical voices of South Koreans themselves concerning the nation's economy and society began reaching US academe.

The lack of criticism toward the South Korean regime by US Korean Studies scholars during the 1980s can be contrasted with the case of James Scott's *Weapons of the Weak*. Scott spent two years in a Malaysian village between 1978 and 1980 documenting everyday forms of peasant resistance against the ruling regime and the struggle between rich and poor, laying bare the contradictions and forms of exploitation that the peasants were subjected to (Scott 1985). The South Korean Studies opus during the 1980s that is based on field research or archival investigation does not deal with the fundamental socio-economic problems that South Koreans were dealing with during this period. Where contradictions or clashes are dealt with, it is in relation to the period prior to 1945, the line of reasoning in such cases by and large aligned with the anti-Japanese stance of the South Korean state. Where contemporary topics are explored, they tended to relate to cultural traditions. But, South Korea in the 1970s and 1980s was a brutal society, where the poor worked with no rights, no protection, and no hope. The now famed 1970 self-immolation by Jeon Tae-il in protest at dehumanizing labor conditions, and the 1980 massacre of thousands of protesting citizens in the southwestern city of Gwangju by the South Korean military did not become topics for scholarly investigation during the 1980s. They had to wait another decade – that is so say, until after South Korea had transitioned to a civilian government – to be covered by US-based Korean Studies scholars (e.g. Shin and Hwang 2003).

It is important to note that during the 1980s, research projects in the field of Korean Studies in the US were primarily carried out by American scholars. This state of affairs again contrasted with that of Japanese Studies at the time, where Japanese scholars from Japan, former international students from Japan who had become faculty members in the US higher education system, and Japanese American scholars actively participated in debates alongside American scholars. For example, Karatani Kōjin, a representative postmodernist critic of Japanese culture, was introduced to Anglophone academe in the late-1980s and early-1990s and widely read by

US scholars of Japan (e.g. Karatani 1993). Also, in contrast with the state of affairs in Korean Studies, leading twentieth-century scholars of Japanese Studies included Japan-born scholars, such as Akira Iriye and Masao Miyoshi. In the case of Korean Studies, while thousands of graduate students from South Korea were trained in the US from the 1970s through the 1980s, they did not become equal partners in the field of Korean Studies in the US. Rather, they returned to Korea, securing faculty positions and facilitating research visits by American scholars or their former advisors, helping (albeit unintentionally) to sustain the unequal nature of trans-Pacific collaboration. Furthermore, as Andre Schmid writes: “In most institutions, Korean studies is usually living in a doubly marginalized position,” that is to say, marginalized within what are already peripheral East Asian Studies departments (Schmid 2008: 14). (This state of affairs is not unique to the US. A parallel phenomenon, in which Korean Studies is accorded second-class status as an appendage to Japanese or Chinese Studies continue to be found at institutions of higher learning in other Anglophone nations, including Britain and Australia.) Additionally, South Korean Studies was primarily carried out in the form of a closed dialogue between South Korea and the US. This is not an insignificant point, when considered from both political and intellectual perspectives. For example, the undertaking of research relating to Korea during the period of Japanese rule would naturally necessitate an understanding of both Korean and Japanese source materials. But, many historians of Korea during the 1980s were not able to handle Japanese language materials, partly reflecting the fact that it was not until 1998 that Japanese language instruction was introduced to institutions of higher learning in South Korea. Until that time, all things Japanese, including performing arts and music, were prohibited from public view. It is ironic that South Korean Studies during the 1980s operated on a narrower terrain than the proto-Korean Studies of Ahn Chang Ho of the early twentieth century, for example (see above).

The changing form of the South Korean polity – from military dictatorship to civilian government – in the early 1990s, coupled with the nation’s burgeoning economic power, had a significant impact on studies of Korea, leading to a disruption in the “South Korean Studies” model. Starting in the early 1990s, the injection of millions of dollars of funds by the Korea Foundation provided an enormous boost to Korean Studies in the US, permitting the establishment of endowed chairs in the US higher education system and carrying the message that this field would continue to benefit from secure employment prospects and funding in the future. The status of Korean Studies was elevated to that of what we might call a first-world discipline – although the process was not a smooth one, with the Korea Foundation and the Academy of Korean Studies, both ROK government entities, sometimes (in both subtle and not so subtle ways) interfering with search process or funding. Still, scholars began moving away from conventions of the “South Korean Studies” model that condoned topics that were benign

and acceptable to the South Korean government, delivering critical assessments of contemporary government policies and examples of social injustice in South Korea. Rather than studying rural enclaves, researchers now roamed the urban cityscapes of Seoul, exploring themes such as unemployment, the Asian debt crisis, homelessness, diversifying sexual orientations, neoliberalism, social media, and so on (e.g. Song 2009). By the end of the twentieth century, Korean Studies in the US had produced scholars of global relevance, their ranks including some who had originally come to the US as international students and would come to serve on the faculty of universities in North America, Europe, Australia, and South Korea. In other words, the historic pattern of the trans-Pacific unequal collaboration between American advisors and Korean (former) students-turned-faculty at universities in Korea was largely replaced by a new and more equal form of collaboration between American advisors and Korean (former) students-turned-faculty that were now teaching and researching at institutions ranking equally to the ones where they had previously studied.

3. Toward a Transnational Korean Studies

Even during the period when Korean Studies in the US was heading in the direction of South Korean Studies, transnational undercurrents continued to exist and again, the Cold War played a key role here, but with a different effect from that which facilitated the development of South Korean Studies – in this case, primarily due to a need to understand the enemy. The closed nature of North Korea meant that those wishing to study it needed to extend the scope of their research well beyond the confines of Korea itself to regions such as the Soviet Far East and northeastern China, as seen in the case of Robert Scalapino and Chongsik Lee's 1972 masterpiece, *Communism in Korea* (Scalapino and Lee 1973; also, Suh 1970, 1980). The study of North Korea's first leader, Kim Il Sung, reflecting his diasporic upbringing, his guerrilla activities in northeastern China and the Soviet Union during the colonial period, and his continued commitment to international communism through until the 1960s, required transnational research (Suh 1988).

More importantly, in some ways, changes in the Korean American scene also resulted in profound and radical changes in the way in which Korea was brought into academe. Developments such as the passing of the McCarran-Walter Act in 1952 (lifting the ban on immigration from Asia), the arrival of at least 100,000 military brides from Korea, and the passing of the 1965 Immigration Act, all played significant roles in bringing about a large-scale

expansion in the Korean migrant population in the US, leading to the achievement of a critical mass that permitted inquiries into Korean American identity and diasporic politics (e.g. Yuh 2004). One important point to note is that while Korean American Studies (in common with other branches of Asian American Studies) marked itself apart from Korean Studies, several of its key texts were rooted in dual origins, i.e. Korea and Korean America – or, more precisely, diasporic Korea, based on a dialogic, multi-sited, and sometimes multi-lingual approach – as seen in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's iconic *DICTEE*, a work that has enjoyed enduring critical relevance and popularity (Cha 1982). Cha's work includes references to Manchuria during the Japanese colonial period, the use of multiple languages, including French, English, Japanese, Chinese, and Korean, and discussion of various historical nodes of Korean emigration, as well as of the political situation in South Korea. In fact, it is truly significant that Cha's *DICTEE* was one of the first (if not the first) scholarly or artistic works in English that alluded to the Gwangju Uprising of 1980, whereby the South Korean military brutally massacred thousands of citizens protesting the military dictatorship, during a period when most Korean Studies experts in the US were silent about the incident (Cha 1982: 81-82). Unlike Japanese American Studies, Korean American Studies has had the potential for a transnational foundation from its very conception, given the ongoing nature of Korean immigration to the US. Japanese immigration, by contrast, largely ceased during the early part of the twentieth century. Moreover, Korean immigrants to the US tend to maintain frequent contact with their homeland – whether via communication, commercial transactions or actual travel – such contact effectively acting as a vehicle for transnational flows.

In addition to the rise of Korean American Studies and North Korean Studies, and given further impetus by Cold War geopolitical tensions (mentioned earlier), a new kind of study concerning North Korea has also contributed to what I might call a shift away from South Korean Studies. The final years of the twentieth century saw a change in the North Korean leadership (from father to son, and then to grandson). Internal instability, coupled with the effects of natural disasters, led to the nation's northern border becoming increasingly porous, prompting the exodus of thousands of unaccountable migrants, firstly to China and eventually, in many cases, to South Korea and other nations as defectors and refugees. This development led to the positing of a set of intellectually interesting questions: Are North Korean defectors in South Korea diasporic Koreans, i.e. how can one be in a diaspora when one lives in one's own supposed homeland? And, more basically, what information can they provide to enhance knowledge about a nation that is largely closed off from the outside world? Needless to say, this turn of events came about during a period of rapid change in South Korea following its transition from poverty-stricken military dictatorship to affluent, yet politically uninterested, neoliberal society. While the far smaller number of North Korean defectors in earlier decades

was received with enthusiasm and heroes' welcomes, the thirty thousand or so defectors that have arrived since the dawn of the twenty first century have been subjected to psychological evaluation, treated with suspicion, and seen as a drain on the national coffers (Ryang 2012). In such an environment, some defectors have sought outside outlets in order to tell their stories, finding sympathetic (and perhaps lucrative) markets in North America and Europe. Many best-selling defector stories have been written in collaboration with or solely by western journalists (e.g. Shin and Harden 2012; Park and Vollers 2015; Kang and Rigoulot 2001; Demick 2010). Perhaps by coincidence, defector literature is, as ironic as it may sound, functioning as a pipeline for sustaining the transnational current within Korean Studies. Quite aside from the defector genre, in the (say) post-Cumings generation, historical studies related to North Korea have always displayed a more transnational tendency, its founding having been brought about through multinational interest and involvement (Armstrong 2003; Park 2005). The authors of more recent works on North Korea tend to have consulted a range of multi-lingual sources, including Russian, Eastern European, and Chinese examples (e.g. Szalontai 2005; Armstrong 2013; Lankov 2013). Incorporating studies of North Korea into the current terrain of Korean Studies, or, rather, dissolving the boundary between studies of North Korea and studies of South Korea, will allow Korean Studies in the US to grow in a more robust and interesting direction.

The outward reach of Korean Studies toward transnationalism has also been predicated upon scholarly interest and concern related to the global Korean diaspora, a development which had been in the making for some time. Here, Korea's former colonizer, Japan, played an interesting role. In the face of the domination of Japanese Studies by the *nihonjinron* or Japanese cultural uniqueness thesis during the late-1980s and early-1990s (discussed above), the study of ethnic and other minorities in Japan became an effective tool in dealing with the assumption of Japanese ethnic and racial homogeneity (for a critique, see Hudson 1999 and Lie 2001, for example). And, in this connection, studying Japan's then-largest ethnic minority, the Koreans, proved a useful strategy in refuting Japanese homogeneity. Since the late 1990s, a large number of scholars working in a wide range of disciplines in the social sciences and humanities have participated in the production of English-language research on Koreans in Japan, as I have noted elsewhere (Ryang 2010).

During the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the South Korean government began engaging in a process of *segyehwa*, or internationalization or globalization, allocating funding to the study of overseas Koreans, or *gyopo*, most prominently the populations in China, the US,

Japan, and Russia, but also, to a lesser extent, in Latin America, Vietnam, and Germany. Today, a larger number of graduate students from Korea studying at institutions of higher education in the US is involved in research related to diasporic Korean communities and transnational flows of people, cultures, and ideas, while more American researchers are engaged with the global presence of Korea and Koreans beyond the binary framework of US-Korean relations. It is safe to say that Korean Studies has begun a shift back toward a transnational orientation, as was the case for the pioneering scholars of the early twentieth century. Needless to say, the political and economic conditions faced by Korea today are fundamentally different from those experienced during the early twentieth century. Then, Korea was under Japanese colonial rule, had little or no say in the world, and was, in many ways, unformed as a modern state. Now, divided into North and South, Korea bears one of the last remaining burdens of the Cold War. North Korea is an international outcast, while South Korea counts among the leading East Asian democracies. Still, the way in which Korean Studies is envisioned today overlaps with its original purpose, based on the notion that a better and more comprehensive understanding of Korea requires that this field reaches out to the world, rather than closing in on itself (as happened under South Korean Studies during the 1980s).

Twenty-first century Korean Studies' transnational (re)turn can be recognized in the work of many scholars. Nancy Abelmann, who has written broadly on Korean social movements, culture, and gender, adopted a new approach by investigating Korean and Korean American students on US college campuses, exploring the challenges brought about by the internationalization of higher education in an age of globalization (Abelmann 2009). Sealing Cheng's work on the agency and livelihood of migrant entertainers from Southeast Asia in South Korean towns where US military bases are located represents an example of a shift towards an even more fluid and transnational direction in the study of modern-day Korea (Cheng 2010). John Lie has carried this process one step further in his inquiry into K-pop (Korean popular music) and South Korean media and society in general by conducting a deep trans-historical investigation into its colonial origins, expanding his focus in a trans-spatial manner to bring this phenomenon to global attention (Lie 2014). My short book on Korean food captures the bilateral (between the US and Korea) as well as trilateral routes (including Japan) taken by Korean food as it traveled along multiple trajectories during a colonial and postcolonial history marked by national partition and diasporic dispersion (Ryang 2015). These represent a small selection of the many works that have brought Korea to the global stage as an object of investigation beyond the confines of national boundaries and nation-focused frameworks.

Moving forward, transnational Korean Studies has a number of promising methodological and topical approaches at its disposal. Approaches that are multi-sited and multilingual in nature are becoming desirable tools for this transnational brand of Korean Studies as Korea itself becomes more globalized and inter-cultural, and as the Korean diaspora continues its penetration of cultural, social, and economic borders throughout the world. This does not mean that transnational Korean Studies confines itself to contemporary sources – such sources may, in fact, come from hybrid settings. Takashi Fujitani's work on nationalism, racism, and wartime mobilization in the US and the Japanese Empire, for example, succinctly engages with the experiences of Japanese American soldiers in the US military and Korean soldiers in the Imperial Japanese military, reinterpreting existing paradigms by making new, transnational connections (Fujitani 2013). It would be difficult to locate Fujitani's work within Korean Studies if we were to confine ourselves to the straitjacket model of traditional, nation-focused parameters. In adopting a transnational approach, his study richly informs readers of the complexity of history, adopting multinational and multi-sited forms of investigation that traverse transnational Korean, Japanese and American Studies. Furthermore, while the focus of his research is on the WWII period, his transnational approach is transferrable to other historical periods, including the premodern and contemporary eras.

It is my view that transnational Korean Studies currently faces at least three challenges. Firstly, there is the question of how to undo or radically re-think the boundary between Korean and Korean American Studies. Secondly, there is the question of how to productively combine studies of North Korea and South Korea. Finally, there is the question of how to discern new configurations in making (so-called) Western theory work for transnational Korea. In today's rapidly globalizing world, Korean immigration is no longer one-directional. Millions of Koreans make frequent journeys between their homeland and their host countries, many of them multi-lingual, multi-cultural, and multi-sited immigrants themselves, having more than one host country. The Korean American population is a relatively new one among immigrant groups in the US, allowing Korean American Studies to think about Korea and Korean America in a holistic manner, focusing on ongoing forms of communication and transaction between homeland and host country (e.d]g. Kkm and Yu 1997). But, there are also tangible historical process that Korean Americans trod, as for example can be seen in the recent study by Edward Chang and Woo Sung Han on Korean American pioneer aviators (2015). Already in the 1990s, Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies programs in the US higher education have begun dialogue with Asian Studies, since, as can be seen in Lisa Lowe's seminal intervention, *Immigrant Acts*, given the ongoing marginalization of the Asian presence in the US, relegating them into the position of the perpetual foreigner, without adopting transnational approach, neither Asian Studies nor Asian American Studies would be fruitfully carried out (Low 1996;

see also Lowe and Kim 1997). Further, routes connecting homeland to host country are no longer limited to those linking East and West, also including connections between East and East, as in the case of Koreans traveling between Korea and a variety of Asian countries (whether on holiday or for employment), the case of Korean products (such as music, soap operas, and video games) that are widely circulated within East and South East Asia, and in the case of Koreans engaged in business activities in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Africa. Rethinking how Korean Studies and Korean American Studies should engage with each other, therefore, is an exciting project that can speak to the globally emerging field of transnational studies (Lie 2012).

Mutual engagement between North Korean Studies and South Korean Studies brings a different challenge. For, the reality is that North Korea and South Korea are now two different states, if not two different nations, with no significant flow of humans, goods, or ideas taking place between them other than the high-risk border crossings of defectors or special economic zones. Nevertheless, as Hyun Ok Park proposes in her recent work, capital flows have already “unified” North and South Korea (Park 2015). Granted, these flows are not straightforward in nature, nor specified in the form of contracts or agreements, but is a fact that the instrumentality of Chinese and global capitalism works to prevent North Korea from becoming an isolated island in the world. Following the journeys taken by goods produced in the Rason Special Economic Zone in North Korea, for example, may lead us to discover that the fruits of North Korean labor often enjoy a robust transnational life. Tracing the lineage of food items introduced to southern Korea by refugees from the North during the Korean War may lead us to realize that international boundaries may not be as frozen as they at first appear, even against the backdrop of ongoing confrontation and antagonism (as I explore in my discussion of *naengmyeon*, or chilled noodle soup; Ryang 2015: Ch.1). In fact, ironically, in order to facilitate meaningful mutual engagement between North Korea and South Korea in the domain of academic research, one *has* to go transnational, given the current state of “dis-communication” between the two. As such, this kind of research endeavor, as it were, may well lead to meaningful political intervention in the current situation.

In order to achieve such a goal, transnational Korean Studies must be able to utilize, as well as critically reflect upon, existing Western social and cultural theories in meaningful and productive ways. Take, for instance, Michel Foucault’s lectures at the Collège de France during the 1970s and 1980s (e.g. Foucault 1997). Such an opus can serve as a tremendous tool for deepening understanding of Korea (North, South, transnational, and global) when thinking

about the shift in governmental form from sovereign power to disciplinary power, and, later, the rise of the biopower, in addition to the historical shift from Japanese colonial rule to national independence, the emergence of separate regimes and the ensuing civil war, and the hardening confrontation between two antagonistic regimes, each with its own unique governmentality (military dictatorship versus a form of socialist totalitarianism) and each with its own discrete cultural and political norms. Such an inquiry needs to venture beyond the superficial use of Foucault for citations or reference entries, instead adopting a Foucauldian approach in terms of methodology to the excavation of institutions, such as the military, hospitals, schools, and the family, and the interrogation of material and immaterial elements of society, such as money and currency, gift-giving, leisure activities, language, agency, and self, while identifying the location and function of power and its multitude, which may be structured in a systemic manner yet remain capable of manifestation in idiosyncratic historicities. With today's new generation of Korean Studies researchers, equipped with their multi-lingual and theoretical skills, this kind of research is becoming a real possibility. Jaeun Kim's study of the precarious ontology of Koreans in Japan and China, and Eleana Kim's study of transnational belonging among Korea's international adoptees, for example, vigorously enmesh currently available theoretical tools in their research, critically overcoming the weaknesses of existing Korean Studies (Kim 2010; Kim 2016). We have every reason to think that more studies of this kind will be produced during the coming years and decades further increasing the relevance of the study of Korea beyond the confines of Korea itself.

Such forms of inquiry can be conducted through focusing on small or large-scale problems – by following the life history of a particular product, such as a Samsung smartphone, for example, or by tracing the history of a century-old institution, such as the ancestral memorial ritual. Such studies can be conducted within or outside Korea, following, for example, the trajectories taken by emigrant families. Examples of such research may not fashion themselves as Korean Studies projects in the traditional sense, yet may produce far richer and more informative findings about Korea itself than projects that started off confined to Korea as a geographical area. The life history of a Korean American might reveal more about Korean society than it does about American society, while an investigation into the origins behind a Korean brand-name product might be better understood set against Asia as a region (e.g. Cho 2008; Huat and Iwabuchi 2008). Historical studies of Korea will also benefit from embracing current theoretical debates in social sciences and the humanities, for example, by rethinking or re-interpreting the paradigms that were accepted during the Cold War period. Such projects will, inevitably, entail transnational nexuses, requiring the researcher to step outside the national confines of Korea proper, both empirically and theoretically. It is this kind of breadth and fluidity, the ability to leave Korea as a mere geographic object while critically commenting on what, both

conceptually and culturally, constitutes the place, people, and set of ideas and things known as Korea, that will enable transnational Korean Studies to become an increasingly relevant field known for its body of critical and ground-breaking research.

All of the above, however, will only be possible when we, the scholars, make ourselves conscious of politico-economic power relations within and amongst the nations and the connections between such relations and global capitalist flows. Only by so doing, we can make Korean Studies critically relevant beyond Korea. Said's Orientalists would never have been able to project the established image of the Orient through the archetype of the cruel, ignorant, childish, crass, and cowardly savage without the security created by Europe's sustained historical domination of the Orient. What kind of conditions do transnational Korean Studies scholars operate on today? The enduring disparity between rich and poor at both national and transnational levels, and the macro and micro workings of a multitude of forces that exploit, dehumanize, and show scant regard for human dignity across a range of temporal and spatial terrains, are abound scholarly inquiries on the global scale.

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