



The Tangun Myth and Korean Studies in the United States¹

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There is something called Kinsley's Law. Coined by the US journalist Michael Kinsley, it states that when a politician tells the truth, it is called a gaffe. I am not sure if it is true all of the time, as I am not really sure that there are universal truths in social life beyond the usual platitudes, such as those concerning our inevitable mortality. To be sure, otherwise intelligent and indisputably wealthy individuals in Silicon Valley contest the impossibility of immortality. Be that as it may, it is difficult to deny that an uncomfortable truth uttered in public almost always causes a gasp, followed by an uneasy, embarrassed silence, and eventually, perhaps, a riposte or an act of revenge. I am afraid that the situation may not be so different for contemporary academics, who purportedly peddle one truth or another, without fear or favor, come rain or shine. For truth is difficult to attain. It is tempting for us mortals to seek shortcuts: a reference ignored, sometimes a whole library's worth on the topic, especially if it is written in one or another foreign language. Worse, we often play games involving chairs and networks, seeking power and prestige and in so doing dividing insiders from outsiders or the elite from the masses, all the while claiming autonomy and authority in relation to our scholarship and the priority and primacy of truth. Unfortunately, as the classical scholar A.E. Housman exhorted in 1892: "The house of delusions is cheap to build, but draughty to live in, and ready at any instant to fall."² He was to articulate the origin of this state of affairs more succinctly and eloquently eleven years later: "the faintest of all human passions is the love of truth."³

Needless to say, as imperfect beings operating within the inevitably finite parameters imposed by time and resources, it is impressive that we manage to write articles and books that withstand the test of time, even if only briefly. Put less charitably, even a house of delusions takes some effort to build and maintain. And, as I suggested, it may very well be the case that there is no such thing as absolute truth that is independent of time and context. Yet, there is a yawning gap between the impossibility of truth and the faux-Nietzschean celebration of epistemic anarchy. We can only do more or better, but it is a good regulative idea to believe that truth can be achieved,

meaning that we should speak and write openly and clearly. The punchline of this essay is that we can do a lot better when it comes to the regnant paradigm of Korean Studies in the United States.

Undoubtedly an essay of this sort invites empty and sterile exchanges about personal motivation and morality. That is not my intention or interest. I am not trying to write another version of *The Dunciad*. I just do not understand why the study of Korea is dominated by methodological nationalism and an insistent emplacement in an area called East Asia with its attendant belief in Sinocentrism. For brevity's sake, I will call it the Harvard East Asia paradigm. While Europeanists have long abandoned many of the Eurocentric and Orientalist assumptions of the human sciences – the implausibility of methodological nationalism, the impossibility of naïve empiricism, the pitfalls of area studies, the inevitable entwinement of power and knowledge – Korean Studies in the United States, albeit with significant exceptions, seems content to continue ambling along on an antiquated path to knowledge: a road to nowhere. My standpoint is not particularly “post” – the menagerie of postmodernism, post-structuralism, post-colonialism, and the like that swept the humanities in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s and is now rapidly retreating, leaving unsavory backwash and detritus. Put crudely, if one is serious about scholarship and wishes to research and write about Chosŏn Korea, then one should learn classical Chinese before starting to thumb through the pages of Foucault or Derrida, Agamben or Žižek (and I would like to point out here that I only teach social theory at my current place of employment). Beyond language, however, any student of Korea, past or present, must be attuned to regional and global dynamics, as well as comparative cases, even if only implicitly. It is impossible to write a truly indigenous, endogenous history of any country or region, and this is certainly so in the case of the Korean peninsula. Yet, we are awash with studies that are involuted and insistently inward looking. Why is it that so few scholars have made even cursory attempts to compare Korea and Vietnam, two smaller, subsidiary states in the Harvard East Asia paradigm? Why the obsession with Sinocentrism

when Korean affairs have often been more deeply entwined with Mongol, Manchu, Jurchen, and Japanese civilizations? Why is it that almost no one outside of Korean Studies in the United States seems to read Korean Studies scholarship? These self-evident questions are routinely suppressed in contemporary Korean Studies in the United States. Instead, senior Koreanists seem rather content with their progress, telling their followers bizarre tales from the field and seeking to reproduce the archaic and mistaken Harvard East Asia paradigm. An attempt to explain why this academic field is so intellectually impoverished takes us into the terrain of its origin myth.

Academic Genealogy

It is not only academic anthropologists who valorize genealogy – as in kinship filiation, not the Nietzschean-Foucauldian idea, though contemporary anthropologists seem more interested in the latter than the former – but also academics of all stripes and colors. Perhaps it is triply overdetermined in the case of Korean Studies in the United States. In the United States, where history colloquially means death, there is a morbid fascination with genealogy, as in the tracing and identification of distant and often fabricated ancestors. Koreans, like Americans (that is, people of the United States), are strikingly Christian, their Bible replete with individuals who begat others in long lines of succession. And then there is, of course, the myth of Tangun. As inscribed in the earliest extant writing on Korean history – it does not seem to trouble Koreanists, or for that matter most Koreans, that the comparable work in Japanese, *Kojiki*, appeared over four centuries earlier in a presumably inferior civilization – this myth involves a fantastic tale of a bear copulating with a human being to produce the first ethnonational or racial Korean. At least, that is the common reading of the myth.⁴ A moment's immersion in this-worldly thinking should alert any reader to the impossibility of inter-species reproduction – a phenomenon that contradicts one of the fundamental

tenets of evolutionary biology – and the rather troublesome implication that Koreans are the offspring of bestiality. What is more, the ur-Korean bear had to mate with a human being: what was his ethnonational identification? Tangun, moreover, proceeded to lord over a population: like the Canaanites in Christianity, whence the subject population? I am troubled to report that it is not just once that South Korean historians have professed their belief in the essential veracity of the Tangun myth. Perhaps by anamnesis, Korean Studies scholars have unwittingly reproduced the Tangun myth for themselves. In the spirit of ethno-understanding (what used to be called “emic”), let me reconstruct the received genealogy of Korean Studies in the United States.

According to the conventional reckoning, the Tangun of Korean Studies in the United States is Edward W. Wagner.⁵ He begat other historians of Korea, such as James B. Palais, who in turn begat the current crop of senior historians of Korea, especially the Peace Corps generation – more on them later – such as Carter Eckert at Harvard. As Eckert put it: “Ed Wagner was the most important figure in the early development of Korean studies, not only at Harvard but in North America generally.”⁶ Like the original myth, the Korean Studies myth and its genealogy are no less fanciful. I do not doubt that Wagner existed, but to call him the father of Korean Studies in the United States requires a heroic suspension of disbelief.⁷ Like the “Koreans” that Tangun came to rule over, Wagner was not alone when he began teaching at Harvard. At the University of California, Berkeley – where formal Korean language instruction began in 1943 – George M. McCune had begun lecturing on Korean history in 1946. He is best remembered for devising the McCune-Reischauer system of transliterating Korean into English in 1938, but he was also a pioneer in his use of Korean-language sources in the United States in his 1941 Ph.D. dissertation.⁸ McCune died when he was barely forty in 1948, but Michael C. Rogers taught there after 1953, and we should not forget Robert A. Scalapino – more on him later – who taught there from 1949. Lest contemporary Koreanists question Rogers’s Koreanist bona fide (perhaps understandably, given that he is better

known as a Sinologist), his *Outline of Korean Grammar* appeared in 1956, two years before Wagner began teaching at Harvard.⁹ From the 1960s, there were other significant Korean Studies scholars, such as Lewis R. Lancaster and John C. Jamieson.¹⁰ It is puzzling that no one regards Berkeley as the *genius locus* of Korean Studies in the United States.

There are other contenders, however, besides Berkeley.¹¹ The University of Washington was the second U.S. university to teach Korean after Berkeley, already retaining Doo Soo Suh and Fred Lukoff as tenured professors by the 1950s. The University of Hawai'i at Manoa also has a reasonable claim. It had assembled a formidable array of scholars, including Peter H. Lee, Glenn D. Paige, Hugh H.W. Kang, Yong-ho Ch'oe, Dae-Sook Suh, Alice Yun Chai, Ho-Min Sohn, and others by the time the oldest independent and continuing Center for Korean Studies in the United States was established in 1972.¹² The first dedicated Center of Korean Studies in the United States was at Western Michigan University, which had gathered C.I. Eugene Kim, Andrew C. Nahm, Do Young Chang, and others.¹³ Columbia University is another plausible candidate. One of Michael C. Rogers's students, Gari Ledyard, started teaching at Columbia in 1966, replacing William Skillend, who had taught there for four years previously. Ledyard would in turn mentor outstanding scholars – JaHyun Kim Haboush, the most accomplished premodern Korean historian of her generation, and Andre Schmid, a most impressive modern Korean historian. Beyond Berkeley, Hawai'i, Western Michigan, and Columbia, numerous scholars engaged in the study of Korea in the 1950s and 1960s, ranging from George M. McCune's brother, Shannon McCune, who wrote extensively on geography and finished his career at the University of Florida, to exiled or diasporic Koreans, such as Bong Youn Choy and Harold Sunoo, who were the first teachers of the Korean language at Berkeley and Seattle, respectively. Both hailed from Pyongyang, studied at Aoyama Gakuin University, majored in political science, and were passionate, progressive nationalists. Yet, they were initially consigned to be language instructors, although they would go on to publish extensively.¹⁴ The list of South

Korean scholars in the United States is long, and many of them – some willingly, others less so – studied their natal land.¹⁵

More troubling for the Tangun myth of Korean Studies in the United States is the rather inconvenient fact that there were already outstanding scholarly works on Korea in English before Liberation, and written in the United States to boot. Let me name just two examples. Hoon K. Lee's *Land Utilization and Rural Economy in Korea* (1936) is a brilliant work of scholarship. Thoroughly researched and theoretically informed, it is the sort of work that actually stands the test of time. We do not read it anymore because most people care little about the rural economy of colonial Korea. Andrew J. Grajdanzev's *Modern Korea* (1944) is a superb synthesis of the political, economic, and social forces that shaped colonial Korea. Replete with exhaustively excavated statistical data, it is analytically sharp and powerfully argued. It is not an accident that both works were published under the auspices of the Institute of Pacific Relations, which produced some of the greatest works of critical Asian studies, including those of Owen Lattimore on Mongolia and China and E.H. Norman on Japan.¹⁶ There were numerous other scholarly contributions to Korean Studies in the United States before Liberation.¹⁷ Tempting as it may be to cast an enormously condescending perspective on our predecessors, it would still be impossible to deny their existence altogether, as if Wagner and his students created Korean Studies *ex nihilo*. Like most entities, Korean Studies in the United States emerged over time from the work of many individuals and organizations. An academic parlor game involving questions such as whether this or that scholar or university founded Korean Studies in the United States – and when – may be *recherché* enough to intrigue some scholars, but it is not a particularly compelling endeavor, and there is no one right answer to such questions. I would probably date the institutionalization of the field to the second half of the 1960s: the establishment of the Committee on Korean Studies within the Association for Asian Studies in 1966, the first national conference on Korean Studies in 1968, and the launching of three journals more or less

devoted to Korean Studies: *Korean Economist* (1968), *Asian Forum* (1969), and *The Journal of Korean Studies* (1969).¹⁸

Wagner as Tangun makes no sense. Wagner was a genial enough sort, but it would be difficult to portray him as a productive and influential scholar – perhaps fittingly for a scholar of *yangban* – much less an intellectual colossus. His book, *The Literati Purges* (1974), was virtually unchanged from his 1959 Ph.D. dissertation.¹⁹ The Munkwa project that he founded and directed compiled a database of successful civil-service examinees during the long Chosŏn Dynasty. Yet, even by the standards of the time, it showed little originality and certainly no creativity. Put differently, the would-be emperor of Korean Studies was sartorially challenged. As an undergraduate in the late 1970s, I duly went to talk to the putative founders of the three major national studies of East Asia (no one taught Vietnam at the time, itself a shocking state of affairs given the enormous impact of the Vietnam War on the United States). John K. Fairbank was a gentleman-scholar, who could discourse fluently and impressively on topics ranging from U.S. foreign policy to the philosophy of the sciences (not just on Needham, but also the Scientific Revolution). Edwin O. Reischauer was suave and urbane, reeling off one indelible anecdote after another. A master name-dropper – from JFK to LBJ and Japanese prime ministers to Kawabata and Mishima – he lacked intellectual gravitas when compared with Fairbank, but it is hard to fault him for scholarly productivity or real-world influence. And then there was Wagner. The first thing he asked me about was my lineage – he simply assumed that I hailed from a *yangban* background – and he could not let go of the topic. He did not seem to have any idea what historiography meant and belied any suggestion that he may have read a book outside of Korean Studies. At the time, his contemporaries in the neighboring field of Chinese history were producing one brilliant book after another: Jonathan D. Spence penned a series of spellbinding narratives on one or another aspect of cultural history, while Phillip A. Kuhn published a small masterpiece of analytical history on rebellion and

social structure in Qing Empire, as well as a wonderful account of the popular *mentalité*.²⁰ Ignorant or insouciant, Wagner was content to wallow in Chosŏn chronicles of emperors and generals and engage in accounting exercises related to real and fabricated *chokpo* [*lineage registry*]. Wagner stands as the Casaubon of Korean Studies.²¹

Genealogy does not descend naturally and ineluctably from the past to the present. Rather, it is constantly constructed and contested. Inconvenient ancestors are erased, while suitable predecessors to ennoble the present generation emerge retrospectively. Why squelch the achievements of Lee, Grajdanzev, McCune, and many others? There are two plausible reasons why Wagner became the Tangun. One is his lifelong association with the self-professed greatest university in the world. By osmosis or diffusion, greatness was thrust upon him. That is, there was a bizarre syllogism: Wagner is a Harvard professor; Harvard is the greatest university in the world; Wagner must be the greatest scholar of Korea.²² Status and position are all: without a tenured professorship at a major university, it is not only difficult to establish reputation, but more importantly, to have students. Fortunately for Wagner, his first Ph.D. student, James B. Palais, taught at the University of Washington from 1968 and attracted students from the Baby Boomer generation, many of whom went on to positions at leading research universities: John Duncan (UCLA), Carter Eckert (Harvard), Michael Robinson (Indiana, USC), and others, and they would in turn advise scholars who now hold professorships at prestigious universities (Stanford, Harvard, UCLA, and so on). As the teacher of their teacher (or their teacher), Wagner was the *fons et origo*, therefore becoming celebrated as the founder of Korean Studies in the United States. Curiously, among Wagner's obituaries and memorabilia, there is hardly a mention of his academic adviser. Perhaps Reischauer can rest content with his role as the putative father of Japanese Studies in the United States, though his interest in Korean Studies was substantial (and not only as the bearer of the second name in the McCune-Reischauer system). It would be hyperbolic to speak of an Oedipal

moment in Korean Studies in the United States, but it is as if the suppression of Wagner's ties to Reischauer recapitulated that of Korea's to Japan. In any case, Doo Soo Suh taught Korean Studies at Harvard between 1952 and 1955 before accepting a permanent position at the University of Washington, but his existence, like that of the natives in most plantation-settler societies, has been all but expunged.²³

Was Palais the second coming? His first book, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea* (1975), offered a fine conspectus of the Chosŏn state and Taewŏngun. The second, *Confucian Statecraft and Korean Institutions* (1996), is a sprawling tome that focuses on Yu Hyŏngwŏn. The polite way to assess his work would be to say that Palais was very knowledgeable about the seventeenth-century political and intellectual history of the Korean peninsula. A more realistic judgment would note his acritic scribbling: loosely focused and weakly argued.²⁴ There is obviously no one metric for assessing the quality of scholarly work; one should consider the author's erudition, analytical prowess, conceptual innovation, narrative skills, and of course the originality of the research and its comprehensiveness. Palais was strong on Casaubon-like, dry-as-dust qualities; he was not strong on analysis or theory. He was true to Wagner and the Harvard East Asian paradigm in assuming the autonomy of Korea and its rubric within East Asia, as well as the specious distinction between the traditional and the modern. In a valedictory lecture for Wagner, he wrote: "I would point out first and foremost to the phenomenon of slave society in Korean history as possibly the most obvious mark of uniqueness."²⁵ Typical of area studies, there is the presumption that each modern nation-state has something like a national character, an essence, or a uniqueness. It is also obvious that he did not carry out an extensive reading of comparative history; as Orlando Patterson, among others, pointed out long ago, slavery is a garden-variety phenomenon that can be found virtually anywhere.²⁶ In any case, it would be hard to see how Palais's *oeuvre* could match those of his contemporary counterparts in Chinese history – not only the aforementioned Spence and Kuhn, but also many, many others.

The influence – indeed, the hegemony – of the Wagner-Palais lineage is puzzling, especially as there are so many historians and, more obviously, social scientists who do not share the metaphorical blood and bones of that lineage. Even in the field of premodern Korean history, it is difficult to identify what it is that makes them more impressive or influential than Haboush, for example, with her captivating book on Lady Hyegyong and her later works on culture and society, or Martina Deuchler, with her immensely influential thesis on the Confucianization of traditional Korean society.²⁷ To be sure, Deuchler spent much of her teaching career at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London – so perhaps should be excised from this essay – but she has often been lumped with Wagner and Palais because of her contemporaneity with them at Harvard. However, Fairbank was her adviser, and if academic mentoring has any impact, then she shares some of his intellectual glamor and glimmer.²⁸ Bruce Cumings can probably claim to be the scholar who, as a foreigner, has had the greatest influence on contemporary South Koreans' thinking about South Korean history.²⁹ Engaging with important theoretical and methodological currents – at once global in outlook and interdisciplinary in approach – his multifaceted scholarship is, as much as one should resist the temptation to undertake invidious comparisons, in a different league from those of Wagner or Palais. He in turn has mentored a series of important younger scholars, such as Henry Em, Namhee Lee, Michael Shin, Charles Armstrong, Suzy Kim, Theodore Jun Yoo, and many others. There are also exemplary works of patient and original research by Robert P. Scalapino and his students. Although often reviled as a Cold Warrior, he was the co-author, alongside Chong-Sik Lee, of the masterly *Communism in Korea* (1972). Involving archival research in several languages – befitting a transnational phenomenon par excellence – the two-volume account is a small masterpiece concerning a truly important dimension of modern Korean history. Chong-Sik Lee's *The Politics of Korean Nationalism* (1963) is a pioneering and impressive account of another important ism of Korean history. Another Scalapino student, Sungjoo Han presents a cogent analysis in *The Failure*

of Democracy in Korea (1974).³⁰ Note here that Cumings, Scalapino, Lee, and Han – and let us not forget Gregory Henderson’s *Korea, The Politics of the Vortex* (1968) – all undertook historical research, but received their doctorates in political science.

Once we leave the terrain of Korean history, the centrality of the Wagner-Palais genealogy becomes unsustainable. Is history the master human science? Perhaps, but it would behoove anyone to ignore the salience of literary studies; art, music, and other cultural practices; anthropology and sociology; political science and economics; and many other fields in the human sciences. Here, it would be facile to bemoan the paucity of outstanding scholarship, but suffice it here to note the existence of rather long bibliographies involving the study of Korea, whether it be in literature (Peter Lee of UCLA being the most prolific), anthropology (Cornelius Osgood, Roger Janelli, Laurel Kendall, Clark Sorensen, Sonia Ryang, Nancy Abelman, Laura Nelson, Robert Oppenheim, and many others), or in other fields. Indeed, Korean Studies has a long and distinguished history abroad – beyond the Korean peninsula – most obviously in Japan, Germany, France, and Russia.

In short, one must be history-centric and willfully short-sighted to believe in Wagner as the Tangun of Korean Studies. Korean Studies existed before Wagner and outside of Harvard, even within the narrow territorial confines of the United States. Overlooking the legacy of dedicated scholars - such as George McCune, ethnic and diasporic Koreans, or many, many others - is simply tendentious, if not offensive. But challenging the currently dominant view of Korean Studies in the United States involves more than just a bit of genealogical score settling.

The Curse of Genealogy

In the United States of the early twenty-first century, in spite of the ubiquity of vampires and zombies in popular culture, it would be farfetched to talk about a blood curse. Modernized as

memes, however, we cannot evade the profound impact of academic mentoring and sponsorship. Surely, “who did you work with?” is among the most commonly articulated questions posed to each other by newly acquainted academics. There is considerable truth to the German nomenclature of *Doktorvater* (or increasingly *Doktormutter*), suggesting something akin to parenting in the production and reproduction of scholars. Implicitly, it is taken as a given that such a process will involve the younger, junior scholars learning the methods (and, increasingly, the theories) of scholarship from their elders and seniors, a phenomenon that may bear costs as well as benefits.

Needless to say, not all great scholars produce great disciples.³¹ In point of fact, the correlation appears weak, but baleful intellectual influences can take some time and effort to dispel. If one’s adviser spent all of his time assembling the key to all mythologies, then it would not be surprising if his students did not stray too far from the strait and narrow of what was believed to be the proper means and ends of their research, however fruitless and futile such an endeavor might prove to be. Yet what is curious about the Wagner-Tangun myth is that very few of his students made serious contributions to Korean Studies, and certainly not in the domains of historiography or comparative history.³²

Wagner’s negative impact was more closely related to his capacity as the point man for the Harvard East Asian Studies paradigm than to any of his personal attributes or activities.³³ East Asia became a recognized and naturalized region of the world as part of the area-studies movement, and it would be a useful exercise to observe the near non-existence of the region before the 1950s. The core belief of East Asian Studies as an academic discipline was the centrality of Chinese civilization, often identified as Confucian: the “great tradition.” According to this Sinocentric perspective, each of the tributary states was subservient, not only in terms of its political economy, but also its culture. Korea, Japan, and Vietnam are Sinified societies – although Vietnam has shifted from the East Asian rubric to be more commonly classified under Southeast Asian Studies in contemporary U.S. area

studies. The Harvard scholars went on to describe and explain the modern “transformations” of East Asia as differential “responses” to the “challenge” of the West, suggesting in effect – in keeping with the nascent idea of modernization theory – the binary of the traditional and the modern. Needless to say, from this perspective, Japan’s “response” was a fast and furious one – it went on to colonize Korea and much of China, thereby upsetting millennia of Sinocentrism and tradition in East Asia.³⁴

As with all academic theories and concepts, it would be possible to identify a proverbial grain or two of truth in the Harvard East Asia paradigm. Moreover, a flawed theoretical framework does not necessarily damn all of the empirical research produced under its aegis. While some genuinely admirable works of scholarship were produced, they grossly overestimated the national integration of East Asian polities, treating them as proto- if not actual nation-states. Premodern polities – in East Asia or elsewhere for that matter – never achieved any substantive form of integration, whether linguistic, religious, culinary, economic, or political.³⁵ It is hard to talk about society or culture when premodern polities were so weakly integrated and premodern states infrastructurally underdeveloped. Recent historical works on Europe have discarded Eurocentric assumptions that long dominated scholarship, even that related to East Asia, which would include the naturalness of nation-states.³⁶ Yet Koreanists in particular have been very slow to shed methodological nationalism in their scholarly analysis. In modern Korean literary studies, for example, it would seem obvious to acknowledge the profound impact of modern Japanese literature – while Koreans may have been force-fed Japanese fiction, there is no doubt that they read it – and, via Japan, other literary traditions, most obviously various European national ones. Yet most analyses and writings assume the existence of a pure and pristine genealogy that can be traced from premodern Korean writings down to the present. Never mind that a large proportion of premodern Korean writings are in (classical) Chinese and that premodern Koreans were mainly reading the

classics and more recent work from Chinese mainland. Even in today's Japanophobic South Korea, Murakami Haruki is about as avidly read as any contemporary Korean novelist. Nevertheless, literary nationalism seeks to expunge the external. To be sure, there are some recent and excellent exceptions to the rule of literary nationalism, and my point is not to expunge the internal and the endogenous at the expense of elevating the external and the exogenous.³⁷

Furthermore, East Asia is a poor prism through which to make sense of the territory that includes present-day China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. *Pace* the Harvard East Asia paradigm, the dynamic elements of the region were not exclusively located in the Chinese plains, but, instead, often in the peripheries. The Mongols and Manchus occupied China (and, though of lesser significance, Korea as well). They did not profoundly transform China, due to the weak integration of the premodern polities, but were far from being sideshows. Similarly, the central dynamics of early modern Korea brought it into close contact with the Mongol, the Khitan, the Jurchen, the Manchu, the Japanese, and other northeast Asian polities, and not just imperial China.³⁸ These northern civilizations had a profound impact on China and Japan, but also, and probably to an even greater extent, on Korea. To insist on Sinification as the only source of external influence does considerable injustice to the historical formation of Korean (as well as Chinese and Japanese) civilizations. It is not an accident that the Japanese and Korean people can, by and large, trace their ancestral origins to groups hailing from the north, though the Harvard prism would cast Mongol or Manchu origins or influences as peripheral, perhaps even eliding them altogether. Indeed, it was far from the case that East Asia was operating in splendid isolation and stability before its military-backed integration into the European order. In this regard, it is also problematic to cast the region as Confucian, when most people were illiterate and almost certainly ignorant of Confucius and Confucianism (which is not to deny that Confucian beliefs and rituals did indeed spread, if slowly). East Asian elites from time to time claimed self-consciously to be Confucian, but other, powerful currents of values and

beliefs also existed, ranging from Buddhism to shamanism. Simultaneously, Southeast Asia – whatever geographical parameters such a term may denote – is much more central to Korean history than has hitherto been acknowledged. We need not only decenter states (itself an almost nonsensical task when approached from the perspective of older Eurocentric historiography and social sciences), but also decenter China – itself a largely nominal entity disclosing a continent’s worth of diverse and pluralistic entities – from our conception of eastern Asia. The general point is that before the dominance of modern nation-states and their imperial conquests, the world was much more fluid, with frontiers, rather than delineated boundaries, operating around the world.

Alas there is a lot more that is wrong with how the Wagner-Palais lineage writes about Korea, past and present, beyond its entrapment in the misleading Harvard East Asia paradigm. Suffice it here to focus on just one example: the valorization of great men. Wagner, Palais, and their followers concentrate on royalty, the *yangban*, and their spiritual descendants. In this regard, it is not surprising that so much of Korean Studies scholarship has focused on captains and kings – or, for the last half-century, capitalists and presidents – rather than soldiers and subjects, workers and citizens, women and children, outcastes and outsiders. Unconscious elitism – the Korean version of dead, white men – is partly a consequence of the plethora of documentation available on the powerful and the wealthy, almost all of whom until very recently were men. Palais may have stressed the role of slaves in traditional Korea, but his students, whether under his direct supervision or otherwise, have written almost nothing about *paekchong* (outcastes) or women. The elision of the marginal sustains the bizarre myths of the Korean nation, in which all of the excluded merely become the “people” of Korea: silent and invisible.

Examples of transnational and global outlooks, as well as theoretically informed and analytically conscious, not to mention politically engaged, studies did exist in Korean Studies in the United States throughout the twentieth century. It was only the truculent methodological

nationalism of the Wagner-Palais lineage, embedded in the Harvard East Asia paradigm, that stressed the fundamental centrality of the nation and the Sinocentric region in the study of Korea. What is especially curious is that whereas historians of China and Japan have followed their Europeanist colleagues in abandoning older, Eurocentric, Orientalist, and nationalist assumptions and methods, senior Koreanists remain intellectually conservative or reactionary. The curse of the Wagner-Palais lineage is a retrogressive scholarly outlook that still survives in Korean Studies in the United States.

What is Wrong with Korean Studies?

It would be foolhardy to condemn an entire academic field. For example, we continue to use statistical methods that were developed during the course of research carried out in an era in which racist preconceptions colored the way in which data was collected and analyzed, despite the fact such views – and the hierarchical systems of racial classification upon which they were founded – have long since been jettisoned. Certainly, there is not much point in simply throwing everything away at once. As Otto Neurath famously put it, much of life is akin to an attempt to repair a ship that has already set sail.³⁹ As tempting as it may be to believe that we can apply the Cartesian method of radical doubt, razing an entire field in order to begin anew and afresh, such an objective would be neither realistic nor achievable. In any case, it is not my intention to claim that Korean Studies has not had its share of solid or even great works, although many of them have certainly been neglected or – to put it more accurately – forgotten. Yet it is hard to shake the feeling that the field has been in the doldrums for some time.

At this point, it would be incumbent upon me to prove what to me is obvious. Needless to say, much is in the eye of the beholder, and it may very well be the case that the field is replete with

senior scholars – and perhaps novitiates – patting themselves and each other on the back in recognition of jobs well done. If so, then this is another reason for the field’s stagnation. It would appear blatantly elitist to tote up the achievements of the top scholars – after all, a field is more than the sum of scholars working in that area at major research universities – but the rude reality is that it is only professors at research universities that have postgraduate students who will then go on to become professors in the future (again, I hope to avoid downplaying the impact of inspirational teachers, but inspired students must still comply, at least in part, with the dictates of their graduate-school advisers). If one adopts a demotic form of measurement – sheer productivity – then the situation is dire indeed. The modal per capita book production by senior scholars at major research universities that pride themselves as leading centers of Korean Studies (Harvard, UCLA, and Washington) is one.⁴⁰ Put differently, several Korean Studies scholars with endowed chairs at the greatest research universities have produced only one book, usually a revision of the dissertation that was required for tenure. In what other field in the social sciences or humanities could this state of affairs exist? Quantity is a vulgar way to measure or assess scholarly quality or impact, to be sure. These scholars would undoubtedly retort that their field is a difficult one – which one is not? – and that they produce high-quality work. Without resorting to Robert M. Pirsig’s ruminations, quality is difficult to ascertain, but it is undeniable that almost nothing in Korean Studies is read beyond the narrow band of scholars and students in that field.

I suspect that the situation is causally overdetermined: that there are way too many factors to make a science out of it. Allow me to discuss some of the oft-cited reasons, which I find less than convincing. First, there is the issue of scale. China is large. Consequently, there is more interest in China, and it is undeniable that Sinology is not only a large field, but also one with a long history. It would be a perverse world – or, at least, a very different one – were Korean Studies to be a larger field than Chinese Studies. But size is not destiny, certainly not in the world of scholarship. If we

consider the human sciences since the end of World War II, then we cannot doubt the disproportionate impact of French Studies, including that of the Annales School of history - Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre, and Ferdinand Braudel – as well as the work of any number of master thinkers, from Jean-Paul Sartre and Claude Lévi-Strauss to Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. This is, in part, a consequence of Eurocentric proclivities – and the seductions of French culture - but a glance around Asian Studies will reveal the outsized influence of Benedict Anderson (Indonesia), Clifford Geertz (Indonesia), Edmund Leach (Burma), or James Scott (Vietnam, the Philippines): all scholars whose works are read avidly beyond the domain of Asian Studies. Indonesia is a large country, to be sure, but there are not that many students of Indonesia, and certainly far fewer in the United States than those of Korea.

Let me dispel one permutation of this point. Certainly, larger does not necessarily mean more interesting: bigger is not better. There is nothing inherent about Korea as an object of study that would make it less attractive. A wealthy country, whether judged according to the promise of remunerative employment or the accumulation of cultural artifacts and practices, may generate attention, but South Korea has been relatively affluent since at least the 1990s, if not earlier. It has been an empirically compelling country. Whether one is interested in its long cultural tradition or its rapid development, one can find something about which to ponder in Korea. A demographer in the 1960s would have been busy thinking of ways to stop the runaway population growth; the same person in the 1990s would have begun to study how one might encourage copulation and pregnancy. There was colonial rule, followed by a major international war. There is a lot more: from the nation's accelerated and compressed experience of industrialization and the insanely fast rates of rural exodus and urbanization – the stuff of the 1960s and 1970s – to the phenomenon of the rapidly aging society and the country's burgeoning role as a global source of export-oriented popular culture – topics that intrigue people around the world about South Korea in the 2010s. The

existence of the two Koreas, to take another example, allows for almost laboratory-like conditions for comparison. Who is not interested in North Korea?

Perhaps the intellectual stagnation of Korean Studies has something to do with the paucity of positions. It is not impossible to be an independent scholar, but in the contemporary United States, even fiction writers are university professors. Although one might endlessly ponder the chicken-and-egg question about the priority of Korean Studies scholarship and Korean Studies positions, the cardinal importance of professorships – dedicated chairs for Korean Studies – is irrefutable.⁴¹ There were very few jobs in Korean Studies, though far from a negligible number, during the immediate post-World War II decades. Yet at Berkeley, for example, McCune already held a dedicated position in Korean history in the 1940s. In addition, Scalapino, Rogers, Jamieson, Lancaster, and others taught and carried out research in Korean Studies around 1970 without any explicit external funding or internal decision to create or develop such a field. It is also the case that in some East Asian Studies powerhouses, such as Yale and Princeton, Sinologists or Japanologists may have balked at developing Korean Studies in lieu of establishing additional chairs in their own fields. Academic envy can be potent and poisonous. Undoubtedly, the field lost eminent talent to other pursuits, scholarly or not, because of the paucity of positions. All these claims are true, but it seems problematic to stress them unduly. There were surely fewer positions dedicated to Indonesian Studies in post-World War II United States in the 1970s and 1980s – I have not been able to verify the existence of any – but influential scholars, such as Anderson and Geertz, nevertheless emerged. Meanwhile, Richard L. Popkin and James C. Scott were engaged in widely discussed debates on the nature of Vietnamese peasants without relying on the existence of Vietnamese Studies positions.⁴² Affirmative action for Korean Studies is insufficient for creating and sustaining a thriving intellectual field.

As a related issue, money may also have been a factor. It is impossible to do much of anything without resources. A certain amount of funding is absolutely necessary for scholarship: not only for covering basic needs, such as food and shelter, but also for carrying out research, perforce an expensive pursuit, especially if one is required to travel long distances to study people, inspect documents, or spend years preparing for such activities through language learning and academic training. Yet, at least since the 1990s, Korean Studies in the United States has been awash with ample funds from South Korea, initially provided via the Korea Foundation. In an expression of emulating Japan in order to supersede it, the Korea Foundation followed the example of the Japan Foundation in providing large endowments to some of the leading universities in the United States and elsewhere. Perhaps it is too early to tell what cornucopia South Korean investment in soft power will produce, but – as I suggested above – money is a necessary but far from sufficient factor in carrying out scholarship, or any long-term endeavor, for that matter. Indeed, there may be too much money in Korean Studies in the United States. Some Ph.D. students and young assistant professors in Korean Studies in the 2010s fly around the world to deliver lectures and attend conferences, leading the life of superstar academics, when what they presumably need to do is to devote more time and energy to research and writing. Intellectual exchange – somehow inevitably called networking, as if academics were conducting international business deals – is important, but younger scholars need more time on their own to develop the fundamentals of scholarship. As David Damrosch memorably put it, we scholars must “learn to love loneliness.” This is because we are condemned – if we wish to be serious – to spend an inordinate amount of time reading, reflecting, and writing (not to mention the painful task of conducting primary or original research.⁴³ In any case, the scores or possibly hundreds of academic conferences in Korean Studies in the United States rarely lead to publications, and even when they do appear, they almost never amount to anything of significance or consequence.

A related external obstacle would be the politicization of scholarship. The dark decades of authoritarian rule – in the case of South Korea, stretching more or less from its foundation to 1988, and possibly beyond, and for North Korea, a state of affairs that continues to this day – has narrowed the range of permissible discourse, often suppressing critical and dissenting voices. During the Cold War decades, the United States was not as liberal or as tolerant as it made itself out to be. Suspected communists and even sympathizers were placed under surveillance, shunned, and at times expelled from academic life. Here, too, it would be problematic to present a clean narrative involving an evil Cold War, an authoritarian South Korea, and the Cold War Korean Studies establishment. Excellent progressive scholars in the 1960s and 1970s (defined at the time largely by their opposition to U.S. involvement in Vietnam) who made contributions to Korean Studies – Jon Halliday, Gavan MacCormack, and Mark Selden, to name a few – are not considered part of contemporary Korean Studies in the United States. This is not because of their politics, but largely because they either worked primarily outside the United States or because the primary focus of their interest was China or Japan. The promising career of Frank Baldwin was cut short by him not gaining tenure.⁴⁴ He was very active in the anti-Vietnam War movement, but also did not manage to publish a book in time. The United States was more or less open to exiled or disgruntled South Korean students and scholars, and the Cold War may ironically have spurred critical area studies. Veterans of the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars – the group that was most vocal within Asian Studies about the Vietnam War and the Cold War – would go on to become influential and include prize-winning scholars: John W. Dower and Herbert P. Bix in Japanese Studies, Maurice Meiser and Mark Selden in Chinese Studies, and of course Bruce Cumings in Korean Studies. It would be difficult to blame the stagnation of Korean Studies in the United States on politics or the politicization of scholarship.

If one were to expand the usual conception of politics into something like the political culture of academic life, one would find examples of all sorts of unfortunate forms of exclusion, including misogyny and xenophobia. Misogyny is not unique to Korea or Korean Studies, but even a smug retrospective glance reveals the ferocity of patriarchal power. Laurel Kendall, the prolific scholar of shamanism, is a significant exception, but she spent her career at the American Museum of Natural History.⁴⁵ Racism – or xenophobia – has also exerted a powerful influence, often erecting barriers to ethnic Asian scholars. Here again, intersectionality is more the rule than the exception. Harold Sunoo left the University of Washington partly because of red-baiting, but his memoir includes passionate discourse about racism.⁴⁶ More generally, ethnic Koreans have found it difficult to gain employment at major research universities. Bong Youn Choy chaired a department at Seoul National University, but his academic appointment at Berkeley was as a language lecturer. To summarize this state of affairs as the result of racism would be simplistic, but it would be difficult to deny the soft racism or casual condescension that consigned so many Korean scholars to second- and third-tier institutions during the decades following World War II.⁴⁷

Rather than the relative insignificance of Korea, the paucity of positions and resources, or the politicization, surveillance, and social exclusions, I wish to stress the particular institutionalization and reification of Korean Studies in the United States during the 1980s and 1990s. The Harvard East Asia paradigm disseminated itself in the form of the Peace Corps generation of Korean Studies scholars who went on to acquire key positions. As I have stressed, Korean Studies in the United States existed before Wagner, but a cadre of the Baby Boomer generation with shared experience as Peace Corps volunteers in South Korea was in the proverbial right place at the right time.⁴⁸ Precisely around the time that the Korea Foundation and other sources began funding dedicated chairs in Korean Studies at many of the leading universities in the United States, the Baby Boomers were waiting to pounce on them and protect their newfound

bounty. The Wagner-Palais lineage myth is convenient, because it offers a useful way of separating insiders from outsiders, real Koreanists from pretenders. Its members have come to dominate the influential universities, where promising but ignorant undergraduates pursue their graduate studies, attracted by institutional prestige and the availability of ample resources.

As with any aggregate of individuals, considerable differences exist across numerous dimensions of human experience and intellectual orientation, but the Baby Boomers were united by their opposition to U.S. intervention in Vietnam, hence regarding themselves as more or less progressive, if not counter-cultural or even radical. Undoubtedly their immersion in an alien culture, not to mention their academic pursuits in an arcane area, accentuated their sense of distance, perhaps even alienation, from mainstream American life. Furthermore, they, along with Palais, were vocal in their support for democracy and human rights in South Korea, and should be given due credit and plaudit. Be that as it may, the supposedly progressive avant-garde had, by the turn of the century, turned into the *arrière-garde* or Old Guard. Members of this group remain on their comfortable perches at prestigious universities, seeking to shape not only the direction taken by current graduate students, but also the future of the field. As I have uncharitably said, they have not been productive and cannot be credited with having broken major scholarly ground, but – thanks to anti-age discrimination laws that proscribe mandatory retirement in U.S. organizations – continue to occupy their positions of privilege.

It would be facile to castigate them for their individual limitations or perhaps to discern prosopographic commonalities. As seen in the example of Bruce Cumings – “one of them,” from a sociological vantage point – they were by no means condemned to subscribe to methodological nationalism or the Harvard East Asia paradigm. However, most of them remain resolutely in the Wagner-Palais mold, resisting, whether explicitly or implicitly, comparative, transnational, and global perspectives as well as theoretical ruminations and methodological innovations. They wantonly

reject innovative proposals or manuscripts by virtue of their dominance of the most important gate-keeping committees and editorial boards of journals and publishers but most importantly in their pedagogy, mentorship, and sponsorship. The gatekeepers are also in turn the beneficiaries of South Korean largesse, with its seemingly endless supply of prizes and funding. Here South Korea's embarrassing cultural subservience to the United States, and especially white Americans, elevates the Old Guard's importance and tickles its *amour propre*. By garlanding themselves with South Korean ribbons and lapels – not to mention adoring and appreciative audiences in South Korea – members of this group have persuaded themselves of their own scholarly greatness. Convinced of their centrality to the field, they have sustained a misleading narrative about the past and present of Korean Studies in the United States.

In the United States in the 2010s, it would seem almost trite to point out the necessity of comparative, transnational, and global analysis. But such obviousness remains obfuscated in the case of Korean Studies in the United States. As I have said, it would be misleading to write about premodern Korea without learning classical Chinese, but it would in fact be important to be able to read other scripts as well, and I am not referring here to Western-language scholarship. Even in the case of an impeccably Korean topic such as the promulgation of the Korean script, any reasonable study would need to consider the relationship of han'gŭl to other Northeast Asian scripts. Only a Sinocentric outlook would make it seem that the only influence was the proximate one from China.⁴⁹ Beyond language and comparison lies the indubitable reality that Korean affairs have not been strictly delineated by national boundaries. Most obviously, exiled and diasporic Koreans were of cardinal importance in the formation of both North and South Korea, yet Korean Studies – like North and South Korea in the 1970s and 1980s – largely excluded the Korean diaspora from its ambit. Reflecting the old tension between Asian Studies and Asian American Studies, intellectual

issues often overlapped with ethnopolitics to produce a hard and fast dividing line, to the detriment of both.

There is another dimension to the pitfalls of myopic nationalism: the large and ethnocentric world of US academe. In a country where the punch line to the joke – “What do you call someone who speaks three languages? Trilingual. What do you call someone who speaks two languages? Bilingual. And what do you call someone who speaks only one language? American.” – is an excoriation of its insistent insularity, the situation is exacerbated by the equally insistent subservience of South Korea to the United States. Not surprisingly, much of South Korean funding and concern about Korean Studies revolves around the state of play in the United States.⁵⁰ The bi-national axis downplays, and at times ignores altogether, Korean Studies elsewhere. Certainly, US-based scholars safely ignore the massive contributions of these marginalized Koreanists. Any satisfactory Korean Studies cannot be achieved by and in only one country.

A general discouragement of innovation is an unfortunate byproduct of the aging process. Yet, precisely when there are interesting theoretical debates and an almost universal stricture against methodological nationalism, Korean Studies remains serenely indifferent to intellectual innovation and upheaval in neighboring areas as well as in the main human-sciences disciplines. Instead, an enormous amount of energy is spent on identifying whether or not someone is a Koreanist, when the field would almost certainly benefit from a consideration of different theories, disciplines, and methods. To give one example, just because a demographer is ignorant of the Korean language does not make her by fiat unfit to advance our understanding of Korea, past or present. A literary scholar immersed in contemporaneous Japanese literature can fruitfully contribute to the study of modern Korean literature – consider only Yi Kwang-su and Yi Sang. One’s comprehensive condemnation of Japanese colonialism or imperialism is not a sustainable justification for refusing to learn the language. By extension, while it is true that much of Japanese scholarship on Korea has been colored

by something akin to Orientalism, it is dispiriting to note that almost no Japanese-language scholarship has been incorporated within Korean Studies in the United States.⁵¹ Most significantly, by identifying insiders (or “real” Koreanists) from outsiders – presumably illegitimate Korean Studies scholars – writers insulate Korean Studies from interesting perspectives, important theories, and innovative scholarship.⁵² It is of course a matter of perspective, but in a field that is neither a discipline nor a department – there are no degree-granting academic departments in Korean Studies in the United States – it is curious that there is such an obsession with identifying “true” Koreanists from “fake” ones. The road to purity is strewn with discarded ideas, unused methods, ignored scholars, and brilliant books.

The Old Guard has constructed a convenient genealogy and identified an ancestral lineage. In so doing, they have cast into darkness much of what was Korean Studies during the twentieth century, all the while clinging to methodological nationalism and the Harvard East Asia paradigm. In spite of their politically progressive self-identification, they have become resistant to newer movements in the human sciences and, in so doing discourage interesting and innovative scholarship in Korean Studies in the United States. They seem to have forgotten that scholarship is constructed on the basis of research – reading and thinking – not from ancestor worship. Self-criticism or intellectual corrigibility seems unlikely. Max Planck’s succinct sociology of scientific progress is apt here: “The truth never triumphs, its opponents die.”⁵³

What Is to Be Done?

Given the preponderance of students interested in Korea, the continuing significance of the two Koreas, as well as the permanence of positions and money (that is, endowed chairs and

endowments) at many leading U.S. universities, it is difficult to be all that pessimistic about Korean Studies in the United States. While many ethnic and diasporic Koreans will become interested in their heritage, in turn influencing their friends and neighbors, many non-Koreans will be inspired by the empirically compelling nature of the two Koreas. The Old Guard will pass, gently or not, into the night. There are now different entry points into Korean Studies, and neither missionaries nor Peace Corps volunteers will dominate; it is unlikely that a new hegemonic bloc will form. Hitherto problematic forms of exclusion based on misogyny or xenophobia have vitiated. Furthermore, there is only so much that the South Korean government and its operatives can do to curb freedom of inquiry and expression in the United States (or elsewhere). The draughty shack that the Wagner-Palais lineage erected from the received Harvard East Asia paradigm – propped up tenuously by its students, now members of the Old Guard – will soon collapse. The future seems bright.

I am not sure if all the immersion in history or structural constraints will have much effect in constraining or informing the present and therefore the future. An anti-sociological and anti-structuralist answer would be: “Just do it.” The voluntaristic solution in this regard would simply involve an admonition to be ambitious. An impressive work of scholarship will attract younger scholars, who may hope to emulate and possibly supersede it. Alas, it still remains for would-be scholarly revolutionaries to acquire adequate skills in order to prepare themselves for these tasks, such as the development of linguistic, historical, theoretical, methodological, or practical knowledge: the list is dispiritingly long. Nobody said it would be easy, but scholars and students of Korea have nothing to lose but their chains to the false orthodoxy of methodological nationalism and area studies. In so doing, they will undoubtedly resurrect some of the buried and forgotten ancestors of Korean Studies in the United States. We should strive for better ancestors and exemplars.

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NOTES

¹ I have used the McCune-Reischauer system, except in the case of common names and for individuals who have names that are commonly transliterated in idiosyncratic ways. I have also used short titles throughout for brevity's sake. All of the URLs were active as of 17 May 2016.

² A.E. Housman, *Introductory Lecture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937, p.38.

³ A.E. Housman in his edition of M. Manilii [Marcus Manilius], *Astronomicon*, vol.1, London: Grant Richards, 1903, p.xliii.

⁴ See the English translation and the commentary in James Huntley Grayson, *Korea – A Religious History*, rev. ed., London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002 [1989], Appendix 1. Sin Ch'ae-ho bears much of the responsibility for the myth's popularity (e.g. his *Chosŏnsanggosa*, Seoul: Samsŏng Misul Munhwa Chedan, 1977, orig. 1915). See in general Henry H. Em, *The Great Enterprise*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.

⁵ See e.g. Charles K. Armstrong's overview: "Development and Directions of Korean Studies in the United States," *Journal of Contemporary Korean Studies* 1:27-40, 2014. For overviews of Korean Studies in the United States, see Ronald A. Morse, *Korean Studies in America*, Lanham: University Press of America, 1983; and Joint Committee on Korean Studies, Social Science Research Council, and Asia Program, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, *Report on Korean Studies in the United States*, Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center, 1992.

⁶ Quoted in Ken Gewertz, "Edward Wagner Dies at 77," *Harvard University Gazette*, 10 January 2002, available at: <http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/2002/01.10/08-wagner.html>. I am aware that obituaries and memorials are not the places to speak ill of the dead and that the rhetoric of appreciation is duly inflated.

⁷ See e.g. Lee Hoon-sang, "Edward W. Wagner: The Father of Korea Studies in North America," *Review of Korean Studies* 7:117-132, 2004.

⁸ “Korean Relations with China and Japan, 1800-1864,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1941. His most sustained work was published posthumously as *Korea Today*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950. The best assessment of his life and work is An Jong-chol, “Making Korea Distinct,” *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 17:155-192, 2004.

⁹ Michael C. Rogers, *Outline of Korean Grammar*, Berkeley: Department of Oriental Languages, University of California, Berkeley, 1956. See also Michael C. Rogers, Clare You, and Kyungnyun K. Richards, *College Korean*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992. Beyond his language writings, he also wrote extensively on the Koryŏ Dynasty.

¹⁰ See e.g. Lewis R. Lancaster, *The Korean Buddhist Canon*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979; and John C. Jamieson, “The Samguk Sagi and the Unification Wars,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1969. Lancaster in particular would wield a huge impact, and mentored the current generation of leading Korean Buddhologists, including Robert Buswell, Eun-Su Cho, and Sung-taek Cho.

¹¹ For accounts of Korean Studies in the United States in the 1960s, see Andrew C. Nahm, “The Development of Korean Studies in the United States,” *Journal of Korean Studies* 1(2):9-42, 1971, and Hesung C. Koh, “Scholars in Korean Studies,” *Forum* 11, 1969, available at: <http://www.koreanstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Koreanology-and-Korean-Communities-in-the-USA.pdf>. Various centers or programs of or for Korean Studies maintain websites, often with abbreviated historical accounts, which I have consulted but have not referenced in this paper.

¹² It is symptomatic of the elision of UH Manoa that in Peter H. Lee’s retrospective of his intellectual life not a word is mentioned about Manoa, where he spent a quarter-century. See Mickey Hong, “Peter H. Lee,” *Azalea* 1:370-389.

¹³ Based on the earliest publication by the Center for Korean Studies at Western Michigan University, the year is 1969. Its predecessor, *Korea Research and Publications*, began in 1963. Once a beacon of Korean Studies in the United States, its past is now shrouded in darkness.

¹⁴ See e.g. Hyung-chan Kim, “Bong Youn Choy,” in Kim, ed., *Distinguished Asian Americans*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1999, pp.69-72. Interestingly, their most widely read books appeared in the same year from the same publisher: Bong Youn Choy, *Koreans in America*, Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979; and Harold Hakwoon Sunoo, *America’s Dilemma in Asia*, Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979.

¹⁵ See Chon Sun Ihm and Hee Jung Choi, “Early Study Abroad,” in Adrienne Lo, Nancy Abelmann, Soo Ah Kwon, and Sumie Okazaki, eds., *South Korea’s Education Exodus*, pp.25-39, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015. According to Nahm, “some 30 doctoral dissertations on Korean subjects” were written between 1955-1964, all but three by South Koreans (“The Development of Korean Studies in the United States,” p.14).

¹⁶ John N. Thomas, *The Institute of Pacific Relations*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974, and Tomoko Akami, *Internationalizing the Pacific*, London: Routledge, 2002.

¹⁷ See e.g. bibliographic references – by no means complete – in Nahm, “The Development of Korean Studies in the United States.” Robert Oppenheim, *An Asian Frontier*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016, presents a conspectus of Anglophone anthropological writings on Korea before Liberation. There were also substantial writings by scholars who may not be deemed Korean Studies scholars on Korea. For example, in the field of diplomatic history or international relations, see Fred Harry Harrington, *God, Mammon, and the Japanese*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1944 (the book is mainly on Horace Allen and Korea), and M. Frederick Nelson, *Korea and the Old Orders in Eastern Asia*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1945. Harrington would become the President of University of Wisconsin – Madison and have a close association with the redoubtable historian, William Appleman Williams.

¹⁸ See Nahm, “The Development of Korean Studies in the United States,” part II. Note again that Wagner’s role is minimal – almost invisible – in all of these activities. It is symptomatic of the Wagner-Palais lineage that the original *Journal of Korean Studies* was all but buried at its re-launch in 1979, the first volume of the “second series” claiming the mantle as Vol.1, No.1. The “second series” ceased publication in 1992, but was later re-launched with the numbering sequence continuing from the previous series rather than beginning with Vol.1, No.1. An eminently minor point, but it speaks loudly and clearly about the relationship between members of the Wagner-Palais lineage and the predominantly South Korean academics who populated Korean Studies in the 1960s and 1970s and launched the journal.

¹⁹ To be fair, Wagner had published a very short report earlier, which can be considered as a book: *The Korean Minority in Japan, 1904-1950*, New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1951.

²⁰ For Jonathan D. Spence, see e.g. *The Death of Woman Wang*, New York: Viking, 1978, and *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*, New York: Viking Penguin, 1984. For Philip A. Kuhn, see for instance *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980, and *Soulstealers*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990. It would certainly be pointless to write a sustained academic treatise concerning U.S. historical writing on Korea, unlike in the case of China: Paul A. Cohen, *Discovering History in China*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.

²¹ It is a bit odd to defend a fictional character, but Edward Casaubon had single-minded dedication and grandeur in his conception. I will not delve into an examination of Wagner’s marital life, but his second wife, Namhi Kim Wagner, has had a long second life as a potter. See Aziz B. Yakub, “Free and Wild,” *Harvard Crimson* 29 March 2016, available at:

<http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2016/3/29/Namhi-Kim-Wagner-Gallery-224/>.

²² There is not much point in entertaining counterfactual possibilities, but would the tone and tenor of Korean Studies in the United States have differed had George M. McCune enjoyed a longer life?

It is also puzzling that Ledyard, ensconced in a major university with several prominent students, did not gain greater eminence. This and other evidence led me to stress the significance of the Peace Corps generation in limning the Wagner-Palais lineage as the royal school – at times the only school – of Korean Studies in the United States.

²³ Nahm contends that “Professor Doo-soo Suh [sic] established the first Korean Studies program in the United States at Harvard in 1952” (“The Development of Korean Studies in the United States,” p.14). I am not sure of the basis for this claim – as noted, McCune was already teaching at Berkeley – but it does point to the tendentious nature of the claim that Wagner was the founder of Korean Studies, even at Harvard.

²⁴ As Palais explains in his interview with Han Hong-gu: “When I decided to study Korean history, I knew absolutely nothing. I wanted to study Korean history without any preconceived notions” (“Interview with James B. Palais,” *Review of Korean Studies* 4:281-313, p.304). Obviously Palais never read (or at least did not comprehend) Kant, but it is in general impossible to know anything without an awareness of extant conceptions and frameworks. This naïve empiricist outlook may partly account for his unwieldy book. For a more favorable assessment, see Martina Deuchler, “The Flow of Ideas and Institutions,” *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 21:313-322, 2008. See also Chŏng Tu-hŭi, *Miguk esŏ ūi Han’guksa yŏn’gu*, Seoul: Kukhak Charyowŏn, 1999, Michael D. Shin, “Major Trends of Korean Historiography in the US,” *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies*, 3:151-175, 2003, and Andre Schmid, “Korean Studies at the Periphery ad as a Mediator in US-Korea Relations,” *SAI* 4:9-34, 2008.

²⁵ James B. Palais, “A Search for Korean Uniqueness,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 55:409-425, 1995, p.416.

²⁶ See Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.

²⁷ See JaHyun Kim Haboush, *The Memoirs of Lady Hyegyong*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, Martina Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea*, Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, and JaHyun Kim Haboush and Martina Deuchler, eds., *Culture and the State in Late Chosŏn Korea*, Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999.

²⁸ See “An Interview with Martina Deuchler,” *Review of Korean Studies* 4:173-195, 2001.

²⁹ Needless to say, Cumings’s masterpiece is his two-volume *Origins of the Korean War*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980-1991. Given his membership and friendship with the Peace Corps generation, his deviation and departure from the Wagner-Palais lineage has a great deal to do with his graduate education at Columbia – as a Ph.D. student, he was influenced by Dorothy Borg, Frank Baldwin, and others – his immersion in the Committee of Critical Asian Scholars, and his affiliation with critical thinkers in South Korea, Japan, and the United States. Put simply, he did not remain trapped inside the cocoon of Korean Studies in the United States. See Michael D. Shin, “An Interview with Bruce Cumings,” *Review of Korean Studies* 7:115-144.

³⁰ Robert P. Scalapino and Chong-Sik Lee, *Communism in Korea*, 2 vols., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972, Chong-Sik Lee, *The Politics of Korean Nationalism*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963, Sungjoo Han, *The Failure of Democracy in South Korea*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974. On Scalapino, see his meandering memoir, *From Leavenworth to Lhasa*, Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 2008.

³¹ Greatness does not beget greatness; regression to the mean is very much the norm. Yet a brush with greatness is almost certainly necessary for a scholar to achieve greatness, whether through the observation of a master at work or the acquisition of intellectual stimulus and ambition. See in general George Steiner, *The Lessons of the Masters*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.

³² There were some good Ph.D. theses, including Fujiya Kawashima, *Clan Structure and Political Power in Yi Dynasty Korea*, Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1972, and Susan S. Shin, *Land Tenure in*

the Agrarian Economy in Yi Dynasty Korea, 1600-1800, Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1973.

Neither scholar, however, secured a tenured appointment at a research university.

³³ Probably the best expression is the two-volume introductory history: Edwin O. Reischauer and John King Fairbank, *East Asia: The Great Tradition*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960, and John King Fairbank, Edwin O. Reischauer, and Albert M. Craig, *East Asia: The Modern Transformation*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965.

³⁴ It is possible to identify a deeper theoretical framework, such as Talcott Parsons's evolutionary structural functionalism or modernization theory, behind the Harvard East Asia paradigm. It is also the case that Princeton and many other institutions contributed to its construction and dissemination. In turn, the Cold War and U.S. foreign policy interests have become the usual backdrop in efforts to make sense of area studies scholarship. See e.g. Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004, and Michael E. Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010. For my take, see e.g. "Moral Ambiguity, Disciplinary Power, and Academic Freedom," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 29(1):30-33, 1997.

³⁵ See John Lie, *Modern Peoplehood*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.

³⁶ See e.g. Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975, and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso, 1983.

³⁷ Karen Laura Thornber, *Empire of Texts in Motion*, Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009, traces the transnational circuits of literature, and Heekyoung Cho, *Translation's Forgotten History*, Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2016, analyzes the impact of Russian literature via Japanese translation on the Korean reading public. Other transnational works of literary scholarship include, *inter alia*, Serk-Bae Suh, *Treacherous Translation*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013; Janet Poole, *When the Future Disappears*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2014; Nayoung

Aimee Kwon *Intimate Empire*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2015; and Travis Workman, *Imperial Genus*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015.

³⁸ Evelyn S. Rawski, *Early Modern China and Northeast Asia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. See also David M. Robinson, *Empire's Twilight*, Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009, and a much earlier work William E. Henthorn, *Korea: The Mongol Invasions*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1963.

³⁹ For an account, see Nancy C. Cartwright, "Otto Neurath's Boat," in Nancy C. Cartwright, Jordi Cat, Lola Fleck, and Thomas E. Uebel, eds., *Otto Neurath*, pp.89-94, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

⁴⁰ Here, I must draw upon my rather long experience with promotion and tenure committees at several major research universities. By and large, textbooks, edited books, translated books, reports and proceedings, foreign-language publications, and related types of material do not count. The only major currency is a university-press monograph or its equivalent. To be sure, peer-reviewed journal articles are important, but a published book from a significant university press remains the gold standard for promotion and tenure in the humanities and social-science departments at major research universities in the U.S.

⁴¹ See the classic expression by F.M. Cornford, *Microcosmographia Academica*, Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1908.

⁴² See Richard L. Popkin, *The Rational Peasant*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979, James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977.

⁴³ David Damrosch, *We Scholars*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.

⁴⁴ Frank Baldwin's 1969 Columbia Ph.D. dissertation, "The March First Movement," is surely the best-cited Ph.D. dissertation in Korean Studies in the United States.

⁴⁵ There were, of course, notable female Koreanists. I have already mentioned Deuchler and Kim, and I should also mention Linda Lewis, Hildi Kang, and many others, but it is hard to resist the impression of a gender imbalance in Korean Studies.

⁴⁶ See e.g. Sang Chi and Emily Moberg Robinson, eds., *Voices of the Asian American and Pacific Islander Experience*, vol.1, Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2012, pp.506-507. See also Harold Sunoo, *Search for Freedom*, Bloomington: Xlibris, 2004.

⁴⁷ The concentration of ethnic Korean scholars at Western Michigan University and the University of Hawai'i at Manoa during the 1960s and thereafter did not lead to either becoming a major powerhouse. Few would doubt the relative lack of prestige of these institutions vis-à-vis Harvard, but this may have contributed in turn to the preponderance of ethnic Koreans at these universities. For an analysis of ethnic Korean professors in the United States, see Sunwoong Kim, "From Brain Drain to Brain Competition," in Charles T. Clotfelter, ed., *American Universities in a Global Market*, pp.335-369, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010. On politics and racism, see Cindy I-Fen Cheng, *Citizens of Asian America*, New York: New York University Press, chapter 4.

⁴⁸ See Kang Hyun-kyung, "Peace Corps Volunteers Trigger Expansion of Korean Studies," *Korea Times*, 7 September 2015, available at: http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2016/03/665_186193.html. John Duncan, who was not a Peace Corps volunteer, is quoted in the article: "I was in the Army. My advisor was also in the U.S. Army, and his advisor had been in the Army, too.... So the earliest beginnings of Korean studies in the United States were with the U.S. military." So perhaps it was not the Peace Corps, after all. Not surprisingly perhaps, men tended to fare better than women. White Americans in turn monopolized the most important positions, despite the fact that there were qualified South Korean and diasporic Korean scholars.

⁴⁹ See Abel Rémusat, *Recherches sur les langues tartares*, Paris: Imperimerie Royale, 1820. Cf. Kang Sinhang, *Hunmin chôngŏm yŏn'gu*, Seoul: Sönggyun'gwan Taehakkyo Ch'ulp'anbu, 1987; and Gari K. Ledyard, *The Korean Language Reform of 1446*, Seoul: Singu Munhwasa, 1998. Anyone who has studied Chinese, classical or modern, should have noted its obvious dissimilarity to Korean, but most Koreanists seem content to believe in Sinocentrism in the study of Korea. See the contrasting arguments by Christopher I. Beckwith, *Koguryo*, Leiden: Brill, 2004, and Alexander Vovin, *Koreo-Japonica*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010.

⁵⁰ See Schmid, "Korean Studies."

⁵¹ See the mindboggling array of post-World War II scholarship in Korean history at <http://www.zinbun.kyoto-u.ac.jp/~mizna/sengo/>.

⁵² For example, at the University of California, Berkeley, beyond the "real" Koreanists (those whom even diehard Peace Corps types could not dismiss), scholars such as Barry Eichengreen, who has written an extremely influential account of South Korean economic development, Hong Yung Lee, a comparative scholar of politics and political culture in China, Japan, and the two Koreas, Elaine H. Kim, a leading scholar of Korean Americans and South Korean gender relations, as well as several others, are routinely ignored, with Berkeley castigated as a secondary presence in Korean Studies. See, respectively, Barry Eichengreen, Wonhyuk Lim, Yung Chul Park, and Dwight H. Parkins, *The Korean Economy*, Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015; Yong Chool Ha, Hong Yung Lee, and Clark W. Sorensen, eds., *Colonial Rule and Social Change in Korea*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013; and Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi, eds., *Dangerous Women*, London: Routledge, 1997.

⁵³ The original quote is: "Eine neue wissenschaftliche Wahrheit pflegt sich nicht in der Weise durchzusetzen, daß ihre Gegner überzeugt werden und sich als belehrt erklären, sondern vielmehr dadurch, daß ihre Gegner allmählich aussterben und daß die heranwachsende Generation von

vornherein mit der Wahrheit vertraut gemacht ist” (Max Planck, *Die wissenschaftlicher Selbstbiographie*, Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1948, p.22). It is difficult to resist quoting La Rochefoucauld’s maxim, which is a psychic articulation of Planck’s sociological observation: “Il y a dans le cœur humain une génération perpétuelle de passions, en sorte que la ruine de l’une est presque toujours l’établissement d’une autre.”