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*Round Table on Library**History*

## Historical Development of Librarianship in South Korea

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### ■ 국 문 초 록 ■

오랜 문화적 전통을 가직하고 있는 한국이 일제의 탄압과 전쟁의 폐허로부터 아시아의 신흥공업국가군 중의 한 나라로 자리매김함에 따라 해방 이후 한국의 정치적, 경제적, 문화적 변화를 가져온 요소들에 많은 연구가 이어졌다. 이러한 한국의 역사적 발전과정에서 한국의 사서직 또한 발전의 길을 걸어 왔다. 본 논문은 구체적으로 1) 해방 이후 한국 사서직의 발전을 살펴보고, 2) 그러한 사서직의 발전에 영향을 미친 내, 외적인 요소들을 역사적 맥락에서 분석한 뒤, 3) 한국의 발전과 사서직의 발전과의 관계를 모색하고 있다.

### Introduction

With a written history dated back more than 2,000 years, Korea, a country with ancient roots, has developed an advanced culture. Located in the heart of Northeast Asia and surrounded by China, and Japan, Korea has been a pawn of international relations fre-

quently during its long history. Korea has nonetheless maintained a unique culture through the course of its long history. Koreans' attention to learning and education, coupled with the introduction of Confucianism and Buddhism, shaped the cultural tradition of the country, both spiritually and practically. These cultural and spiritual traditions

were most seriously challenged by the Japanese rule from 1910 to 1945. The experience under Japanese imperialism brought fundamental changes to Korean society, politically, economically, and culturally. At the conclusion of World War II, the sudden withdrawal of the Japanese and the subsequent division of the country created chaos in the southern part of the country. The invasion of the South by North Korea in 1950 and the ensuing war exacerbated the situation. But beginning with the military government led by Chunghee Park in the early 1960s, South Korea enjoyed spectacular economic growth. As a consequence, South Korea has been perceived since the early 1980s as one of the Newly Industrializing Countries (NICs) in Asia.<sup>1</sup>

Korean librarianship evolved as part of Korean culture. The introduction of Chinese writing and religious texts stimulated the emergence of record keeping and literary works during the Three Kingdoms period (B. C. 57–668). The invention of the Korean writing system in the 15th century, coupled with the earlier development of woodblock printing in the middle of 8th century and the development of movable metal type during the 13th century, not only increased the literacy of the Korean people but also further contributed to cultural advancement.<sup>2</sup> Books became

manifestations of culture as collections were organized — however primitive such collections may have been. The modern concept of a library was imported into Korea during the Japanese colonial period, but at the same time, the Japanese cultural eradication policy limited Korean books in libraries and their uses were strictly limited, hampering further cultural developments and damaging the image of libraries in Korea.

### Development of librarianship in South Korea

#### The Emerging Profession (1945~1948)

After the Japanese withdrawal from Korea in August 1945, American troops established the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) in South Korea, while the Soviet army was stationed in the North. Under the American Military Government, librarianship in south Korea began to evolve, under the leadership of the two distinguished librarians<sup>3</sup>. Pongseok Park and Chaiwuk Lee, with the foundation of the Chosun<sup>4</sup> Library Association (CLA) and with the reopening of the National Library which had been under the control of the Japanese Resident-General in Seoul. The opening of the Chosun Library School, a one-year professional school, also stimulated the profession's

development. Such library professional school, also stimulated the profession's development. Such library practices as cataloguing and library classification, introduced during the Japanese rule, were modified to conform to the Korean situation. The book exchange with American universities and cooperation with the American Library Association (ALA) in 1947 promoted the status of librarianship in South Korea internationally. But although libraries became a part of the emerging educational system, the visibility of librarianship as a newly emerging profession was low during this period.

#### Chaos and Disorder (1948–1954)

In 1948, when the Republic of Korea (ROK) was established in the South, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) was also instituted in the North. The Korean War (1950~1953)<sup>5</sup>, initiated by North Korea, brought nothing but losses and destruction to librarianship on the peninsula. Specifically, the profession suffered from the burning of innumerable libraries and books and from the loss of leadership as a number of library leaders were killed or taken to the North. Although the establishment of the National Assembly Library during the war period was encouraging, librarianship in South Korea during the war was disorderly and cha-

otic, like other professions in the country.

#### Reconstruction (1954–1960)

After the Korean War, South Korea were caught up in the spirit of reconstruction from the war damages. South Korean librarianship was revived with the reorganization of the Korean Library Association (KLA) in 1955. The Association, as a chartered corporation, promoted librarianship through activities led by such committees as Building and Facilities, Education, in addition to the KLA's connections to such international organizations as IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations) and UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization). The foundation of the Department of Library Science at Yonsei University in 1957, with the help of the George Peabody College in Tennessee, also contributed to the revival as well as the development of librarianship.<sup>6</sup> Library education in academic settings not only provided trained librarians but also spread a new concept of modern library services.

#### The Emergence of an Authoritarian State (1961~1979)

The development of librarianship in South Korea was in many ways advantaged by the eighteen-year-long regime of Park that

began with the military coup in 1961. The passage of the library Law of 1963 heralded a new era in the development of librarianship by providing legislative support for the profession. Meanwhile, influenced by the explosive growth of library schools and of trained librarians, library services rapidly expanded, and this in turn changed the public understanding of librarianship, especially in the fields of scientific and technological knowledge, with the diffusion of libraries and information centers. The mini-library movement<sup>7</sup>, initiated by Daesup Eum, promoted public reading and also spread throughout the country. The activities of professional associations continued to be productive, culminating their efforts to establish international contacts at the 1976 IFLA World Wide Seminar at Seoul hosted by the KLA.<sup>8</sup>

#### Into the Age of Information (1980~)

Beginning in the 1980s, as South Korea moved into the information age, there were fresh challenges. With rapid industrialization and its accompanying technological developments, information services provided in information-intensive industry became popular and well-known to the public. The use of technologies such as Machine-Readable Cataloguing (MARC) and library automation contributed to the extension of library services

and librarianship in South Korea.<sup>9</sup> Also, the passage of the 1991 Library Promotion Law, with its repeated emphasis on the relationship between information and libraries, marked a new era of librarianship in South Korea.

#### Forces behind the development

These developments of librarianship in South Korea were the result of a number of interrelated internal and external factors difficult to quantify or rank by their importance. First of all, Japanese librarianship contributed to the development of South Korean librarianship by introducing American concepts of library and librarianship during Japanese rule. However, the contribution was clouded by the simultaneous anti-Korean cultural policies of the occupiers, who excluded Korean materials from libraries, applied Japanese library practices dogmatically to Korean situations, and limited the educational and promotional opportunities for Korean librarians. Thus, the contribution of Japanese librarianship to the development of South Korean librarianship was, although real, sharply limited.

The dynamic leadership of Korea's professional library association contributed to the development of librarianship. The Chosun Library Association, founded shortly after the

liberation from Japanese rule, played the leading role in providing library education and library services until the outbreak of the Korean War. The discontinuity of the association during the Korean War ended with its reorganization into the Korean Library Association. The KLA's activities since then influenced all aspects of librarianship in South Korea, expanding its scope beyond the country itself. The foundation of the Korean Library and Information Science Society (KLISS) in 1971 and the Korea Society for Information Management (KSIM) in 1984 also contributed to its development as South Korea moved into the information age.

The leadership of such individual librarians as Pongseok Park, Chaiwuk Lee, and Daesup Eum contributed much to the shaping and the development of librarianship in South Korea. In addition to initiating the formation of the Chosun Library Association, Mr. Park used his experience under Japanese librarianship to develop the Korean Cataloging Rules (KCR) and the Korean Decimal Classification (KDC) to meet Korean needs. As the first director of the National Library after the Japanese capitulation in 1945, Mr. Lee, with Park, tried to establish modern librarianship in South Korea. Mr. Eum reorganized the KLA after the Korean War and initiated a mini-library movement which promoted

public reading particularly in rural areas in the country.

The cultural tradition of respect for education, derived from the Confucian emphasis on learning, created favorable conditions for the development of librarianship in South Korea. The expansion of schools stimulated the growth of libraries both directly and indirectly. Indirectly, the increasing literacy of the Korean people increased the need for reading materials. Directly, the building of new educational institutions led to an enormous increase in the physical numbers of libraries: The expanding libraries were an integral part of expanding educational system.

The expansion of library education in academic settings also contributed to the development of librarianship. Beginning with two library science departments in the 1950s, the number of library education programs in colleges and universities grew to thirty-two by 1995. Compared to other branches of scholarship, the increase of library schools in South Korea was quite striking. The graduates of these library schools, steeped in the ideas of modern library services, played an important role in demonstrating professional informational and educational services. The graduate programs of library and information science provided the theoretical basis needed for the further development of librarianship in South

Korea.

South Korea's industrial and economic development policy, backed by a strong authoritarian state, also contributed to the development of librarianship, particularly in the fields of science and technology.<sup>10</sup> For example, the Korea Scientific and Technological Information Center (KORSTIC)<sup>11</sup> and the the Korea Institute for Economics and Technology (KIET), sponsored by the government, played a major role in stimulating scientific and technological development, with their advanced library and information services. The development of librarianship in such special libraries as KORSTIC and KIET contributed to the rapid development of general librarianship in South Korea.

The most direct influence of the state on librarianship was the passage of the Library Law of 1963 and the provision of ensuing legislative supports from the government. These legislative guidelines were essential in a society so accustomed by tradition to centralized state direction. Without the state's legislative imprimatur, librarianship in South Korea would have suffered from the lack of public recognition of its status. The passage of the Library Promotion Law in 1991 improved the state of librarianship in the age of information.

Of equal importance in shaping South Kore-

an librarianship today is the strong influence of American library practices and services, library education, professional organization activities, and professional leadership.<sup>12</sup> Specifically, these American influences in the development of South Korean librarianship included the adaption and adoption of the Dewey decimal Classification (DDc) and the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules(AACR), the assistance of librarians and library educators in the Peabody Library School's team in establishing a library school at Yonsei University as well as educating library leaders as part of its project, and advice from and mutual cooperation with the American Library Association and other library associations in the United States. These American influences, both directly and indirectly, brought and sustained the concepts and practice of modern library services to South Korea.

### **Its relation to South Korea's historical development**

After the Japanese capitulation, South Korea under the American Military Government attempted to establish itself as an independent nation by eradication the colonial legacy and by instituting a new independent social order. South Korean librarianship began to emerge as a new profession dealing with

all the activities associated with gathering, organizing, and disseminating the records of human knowledge in an institutional setting. By devising a library classification system and by securing and organizing books needed for people in South Korea, the profession contributed to the people's understanding of their country, which had been forbidden during the colonial period, while providing a sense of South Korea as an independent and unique society. The outbreak of the Korean War, however, hampered further development of librarianship suffered from the looting and burning of books and libraries, and librarianship experienced the loss of librarianship, resulting in the temporary shortage of library leadership.

During the 'reconstruction' period, South Korea attempted to recover itself from war damages, combining internal efforts and external efforts and external aids to reconstruct the country from ashes. Librarianship responded to the nationwide spirit of reconstruction, through the reorganization of energetic Korean Library Association whose predecessor had been destroyed during the Korean War. Also, the establishment of library education at Yonsei university with the help of Peabody Library school team was typical of the country's general reception of external help for its reconstruction. Thus, the recon-

struction of librarianship was a part of the reconstruction history of South Korea during this period. The emergence of a strong authoritarian state under General Park initiated a full-fledged economic development policy as a means of legitimatization. Among many institutions that grew under the authoritarian government, libraries and librarianship were stimulated by the passage of the Library Law of 1963 and by the establishment of such information centers as the Korea Scientific and Technological Information Center(KORSTIC), especially in the fields of science and technology. Encouraged by the government's 'outward-looking policy', librarians hosted international library conferences like the IFLA World Wide Seminar. The state-led New Community Movement, set in motion in the early 70s as part of modernization policy for rural areas and designed to assist farming and fishing villagers to improve their economic and living conditions, popularized the 'mini-library grass-roots reading movement' in rural areas.<sup>13</sup> Librarianship in South Korea was thus directly stimulated by the Park dictatorship's stress on scientific productivity, internationalism, and civic morality.

As South Korea moved into the information age with its rapid industrialization, librarianship adopted new technologies to provide

more effective scientific and technological information services. In response to the government's overall policy stimulating productivity in science and technology as part of economic development planning, the use of such technologies in research libraries, in turn, contributed to the development of information-intensive industry and served as a major stimulus to the economic development of the country.

## Conclusion

Librarianship in South Korea has been a profession that developed simultaneously with the general cultural changes of the country. One can not understand the nature and development of librarianship in South Korea without understanding the socio-cultural changes of South Korea, and vice versa. The understanding of the former without understanding of the latter can result in confused and simplistic thinking about the profession, and be professionally disastrous. The understanding of the latter without understanding of the former can lead to misleading and a distorted

perception of the country's historical processes, and can be historically myopic. Only when the nature and development of librarianship in South Korea and the country's history itself are together understood, can one have a complete understanding of the historical development of librarianship in South Korea.

As shown in the South Korean case, libraries as institutions have been products of the cultures from which they emerged, and their continued development has been both inhibited and stimulated by such factors as the state, education, and religion. Like other social institutions, the library has responded to human needs; therefore, alterations and modifications in the institutions have taken place as a result of historical developments. Library history, therefore, is not only a branch of library science, but it is also a part of general cultural history. "Library history is the concern of every librarian, for history is not an esoteric or special branch of knowledge but a synthesis of life itself" (Shera, 1952, p. 251).<sup>14</sup>

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