

A Discussion of K. J. Hyong's Paper on Foreign Area Research of Korean Geographers -Retrospects and Prospects-

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In Korea, since the early 1990s a growing national need to acquire a rather practical knowledge about foreign areas has encouraged universities to establish area studies program. Besides, opportunities for research fund as well as job openings are expected to increase substantially in the future. Social scientists, in particular political scientists, economists and anthropologists, with their own expertise in the study of foreign area research, were very quick to participate in the development of area studies program.

By contrast, geography, by nature, closely associated with area studies, has been relatively slow in participating in area studies program. In Korea, however, because area studies is in the incipient stage, there still awaits much opportunity for geographers to make an important contribution. To me, it seems that this international symposium is planned to demonstrate the possibility of geographer's contribution to the development of area studies.

The central question in this symposium should be directed toward the effectiveness of geographer's work in contribution to the area studies or foreign area studies. In my opinion, the term of area studies should be distinguished from that of regional geography or regional studies should be distinguished from that of regional geography or regional studies, familiar to

geographers. But, Professor Hyong, in his paper, treated the concepts of area research(not area studies) and regional geographic research as similar term of area studies should be distinguished from that of research(not area studies) and regional geographic But, Professor Hyong, in his paper, treated the concepts of area research(not area studies) and regional geographic research as similar terms. These two concepts, if he considered area research to be the same meaning with area studies that I defined here, are totally different in terms of their usage.

Area studies can be defined as a discipline that utilizes interdisciplinary concepts and methods in the study of foreign areas. The area studies concept was basically American, and it grew out of a frank recognition of America's own unfamiliarity with the areas in question. The modern concept of area studies developed during the Second World War.

After an interval of several years, similar area studies programmes began to be developed in some British and continental European universities, and also in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. But, more recently Japan, India, Singapore, Ghana, and other Asian and African countries have breached the West's monopoly in this respect.

In these countries, area studies in their present form

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are a response to the convergence among the social science on the one hand, and to the massive growth of interest in foreign countries on the other. They are essentially a new form of compartmentalization of work still based, as ever, in developed countries. Geographer's role in this new discipline of area studies varies from one country to another depending on the tactics and capabilities of geographers.

In light of experiences in these developed countries, we geographers must not only demonstrate our own traditional strength but also pay attention to other social scientists' contributions in area studies. Implicit in the conjunction of area studies and geography is the need to reexamine the nature and focus of regional geography. But, area specialists often complain about the "inductive" orientation of "traditional" geographical work on their areas, and yet also complain that deductive approaches and model-building fail to provide totally adequate explanations.

In order to build an area studies tradition in geography, there needs a development of a clearly defined conceptual focus as well as research method. New sets of ideas need to emerge from the cross-disciplinary integration around new concepts or topics such as "development studies" or "globalization". It is these interdisciplinary concepts with which geographers should find their role to play in area studies.

Moreover, in the organization of new sets of ideas we have to pay much attention to the range and characteristics of the research area. First of all,

concepts and methods concerning developing countries or non-Western worlds must be different from those about developed countries. Development studies or cultural ecology, thus, happen to emerge in the interdisciplinary efforts to study developing areas or non-Western worlds.

In my judgement, Professor Hyong proposed economic geography of globalization and new regional geography as a methodology to be applied to area studies in Korea. In addition to his proposition, I would like to suggest several more interdisciplinary concepts that geographers interested in area studies should be aware of. These are cultural ecology, development studies or modernization studies, comparative studies or cross-cultural studies. These concepts are proved to be useful especially in the study of non-Western world or developing areas other than developed countries or Western worlds such as the United States.

In fact, there is a strong public need in Korea to expand a practical knowledge about China, Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe. Partly due to such a need, the Korean government set up a large amount of financial fund to support foreign area studies. Professor Hyong pointed out the United States. In geography, therefore, there is an urgent need to expand their research interests beyond the United States into developing areas or non-Western worlds such as China, Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe. Thank you!