

# Library and Information Policy in Korea and Current Issues

**Too Young LEE**

Professor, Dept. of Library & information  
Science of Choong Ang University  
President, the Korean Library Association

이 발표문은 일본의 學術情報センター (NACSIS, National Center for Science Information Systems)가 수행하는 「國際共同研究」 프로젝트에 참여한 우리 협회 이두영 회장이 지난 3월 5일 NACSIS(일본·동경)에서 열린 보고회에서 참석하여 발표한 것임.      ■ 편집자 주

## 1. Introduction

There are two events that have motivated Korean libraries to push ahead during the past 10 years. The first thing was the move of the government office which had taken charge of library policy from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 1991. The second of these was when the present administration declared itself to be a “People’s Government (國民의 政府),” placing strong emphasis on culture for the coming 21th century.

It is a fact that the Ministry of Education had neglected promoting Korean libraries for a long period of time since Korean government was established in fact. For example, there had been no separate office within the Ministry’s organization structure and only one staff member, positioned concurrently with other duties, could be found doing library matters as an extra job. At that time, the government’s indifference towards a policy for promoting libraries became the main cause that left Korean libraries underdeveloped. It is most unfortunate that a library has been understood as a “reading room (工夫房)” a place where people bring their own books and read, not a place where they search for information they need and participate different library programs for personal improvement. In 1991, the efforts of the Korean Library Association became successful in making the National Assembly pass the law which required to set up a separate department in the Ministry of Culture and to have full responsibility for library promotion. Since then, the Ministry of Culture has been driving forward their

library and information policy.

Meanwhile, the current government has declared the coming new millenium to open with “a century of the culture (문화의 世紀),” and is now preparing basic frameworks to meet new changes in society. They define characteristics of future society as “knowledgeable society,” “internationalism,” “open cultural society,” or “matured citizen society,” etc. I go along with a line of the present government’s namely, “a century of the culture.” However, one thing I’d like to ask our government to be aware of is that the present economic crisis has been mainly caused by the “moral hazard,” and that recovering moral consciousness back in people’s minds could be the only way of preventing another national crisis. What we need is not providing bread or short-term public work plan, but providing information of job opportunities and training programs of necessary skills to get a job. Another thing is that government should provide people various cultural programs to be able to overcome emotional wanderings due to unemployment, social discord, loss of self confidence and feelings of hopelessness.

Korean President, Kim Dae-jung, sent his congratulatory message to the Annual Meeting of the Korean Library Association on September 24, 1998. The message shows that the President is fully aware of the importance of libraries’ role under the present circumstances in Korea.

He said ;

“Establishment of the knowledgeable nation (知識國家) of 21th century would be possible only when people’s mental maturity and cultural creativity are fully supported. These are the true bases of national power and the motivation of national development. However, knowledge and creativity can be acquired from the book, as we always learn from the common truth, - “ways are there in a book.” Therefore, I urge you to do your best in fulfilling your duties with a belief that a high level of library performance will contribute to the enhancement of a nation’s power significantly.”

I am quite certain that the “Culture President (文化大統領),” as he wishes to be called, will contribute to promoting Korean libraries and will provide all librarians a great deal of encouragement and hope as well.

Now, I’m going to introduce, in brief, the library policy of the present government within the framework of a national policy of culture. The recent attempt of changing the name “public library (公共圖書館)” to “lifetime learning institute (平生學習館),” which has been a hot issue in the library community in Korea, will also be mentioned.

## 2. New Culture Policy of the People’s Government

## 2.1 Top-Ten Major Projects

- 1) Establishing the foundations of a basic policy for implementing “the knowledgeable nation of the 21st century”
- 2) Expanding and improving the management of culture-based institutions
- 3) Stabilizing a comprehensive basis for the knowledge & information society
- 4) Creating a proper environment for creative artistic activities
- 5) Improving a quality of life through the practical implementation of cultural welfare
- 6) Systematic protection, succession and development of cultural inheritances
- 7) Establishing foundations for developing cultural industry
- 8) Pursuit of balanced development and integration of local societies
- 9) Pursuit of the nation’s unification by means of culture
- 10) Pursuit of globalization on the basis of cultural identity

## 2.2 Basic Plans for Implementing Policy Projects

### 1) Ensuring the Budget

- National Treasury : allocation of budgets for the areas of culture should be reached up to 1% of the entire government budget by the year 2001 (1999 budget allocation for culture is 0.7%)
- Fund : - ensuring a promotion fund for culture and the arts  
- ensuring a promotion fund for library and reading (50 billion by the year 2003)
- Local Fund : allocation of local government’s budgets for culture should be reached up to 5% by the year 2003 (1998 budget allocation was 1.76%)
- Private Fund : - tailoring a system for inducing an investment of private capital and from big business groups.  
- deduction of income tax for those who made a donation to cultural and art activities.

### 2) Strengthening Human Resources

Strengthening re-education programs to cultivate professionalism of the staffs working in public sectors of cultural administration

For public libraries, the entire positions of directors are to be filled with professional librarians in accordance with the code of Library and Reading Promotion. (as of December, 1998, 54% of public library directors are professional librarians)

The Korean Library Association was assigned to issue Librarian Licenses of by the government in October, 1998

## 2.3 Major Policies related to Libraries

### 1) Expansion of public libraries

The number of public libraries should be increased in order to improve the overall life quality of local people by providing their needed information and various library programs.

#### Targets

Step 1 : total number of public libraries will be 550 by the year 2003

Step 2 : total number of public libraries will be 750 by the year 2011

(as of Dec. 1998, the total number of public libraries is 437,  
370 libraries in operation and 67 under construction)

### 2) Expansion in the Collections of Public Libraries

The level of public libraries' collections in terms of quality and quantity as well measures below average.

The government continues the financial supports positively until the public libraries are highly stabilized as culture and information centers by increasing library materials that can be utilized for lifetime education, cultural programs and leisure activities.

#### Targets

Step 1 : Increase of ratio up to 0.5 book per person by the year 2000

Step 2 : Increase of ratio up to 1.0 book per person by the year 2011

(as of September 1998, the current ratio is 0.38 book per person)

### 3) Evaluation on Public Library Facilities

Operation evaluations of existing cultural facilities each year including libraries, museums, art galleries, etc. will be made to lead a goodwill competition by offering differential incentives of administrative and financial supports to highly graded facilities.

Evaluation criteria for public libraries have been completed in 1998.

#### 4) Integrated Plans for developing a National Electronic Library

Mid- and long-term plans to construct national union catalogs, full-text and multimedia databases will continue.

Plans for developing prototype systems of the national electronic library will be completed by the year 1999.

National library and information network (KOLIS-NET) will be expanded by linking public, university, and special libraries. (700 libraries by the year 2002)

#### 5) Expansion of Small Libraries

“Small libraries (작은 讀書空間)” can be defined as a comfortably designed reading spaces where people can come and go conveniently and read books freely.

Expansion plan

- establishing one small library in each administrative unit
- encouraging the establishment of private libraries within a residential district or business complex
- establishing a small branch library in each public area of museums, galleries, performing art centers, welfare centers, and sports centers, etc.
- providing financial supports and tax deduction to those libraries of private organizations  
( 4,136 small libraries as of 1998 will be expanded up to 6,000 by the year 2011)

#### 6) Building “The House of Culture” in Public Libraries

“The House of Culture (文化의 집)” is defined as small cultural facility linked to local public libraries with the purpose of maximizing effectiveness of library programs.

\* New public libraries under construction in farming and fishing villages will have an obligation to set up The House of Culture. (50 Houses by the year 2004)

#### 7) Promoting Reading Campaign

\* The yearly Reading Campaign, namely “Opening the World by Book (책으로 여는 세상)” will continue.

Activating programs for “the month of reading (讀書의 달).”

Supporting voluntary activities for reading promotion of private organizations

#### 8) Upgrading international status of Korean libraries

Supporting the Korean Library Association to invite IFLA General Conference in the year of 2004

### 3. Recent move to change name of public library

#### 3.1 Outline of the Problem

Last year, the Office of Education in Seoul submitted a bylaw to the City Assembly requiring name changes of the public libraries to the “lifetime learning institute”. Even though the library community and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism had strongly resisted against it, the bylaw was unfortunately passed in December 29, 1998 with a condition to withhold its efficacy until July 1, 1999. Before Seoul City passed the bylaw, Incheon City and Wulsan City had also submitted the bylaw requesting name changes of the public libraries. However, the bylaws submitted by two City Offices of Education were rejected due to a strong opposition of the library community.

As a matter of fact, Seoul City has sent a new proposal recently to the Minister of the Culture and Tourism suggesting the revision of Section 24, the Library and Reading Promotion Law which regulates all positions of public library directors to be filled with professional librarians. If the Section 24 is revised to allow both librarians and administrative officers to fill positions of public library directors, Seoul City will consider revising the bylaw they have just passed.

#### 3.2 Background of the Problem

The Office of Education is asserting that name change of public library to “lifetime learning institute (平生學習館)” is necessary to strengthen lifetime education programs for communities. Their assertion is based on a new bill of Lifetime Education (平生教育法案) that is in progress at the Assembly’s Education Committee. The Section 13 of the bill reads as follows:

##### Section 13

item 3 : a local government body is to operate a lifetime learning institute within the district to fulfil the functions as defined by item 1.

item 4 : the lifetime learning institute will be operated by the local government’s bylaw, and could possibly utilize public library facilities according to the particular local situations.

But the real motive of the Office of Education to change the names of public libraries is that administrative officials who are at present in the positions of public library directors do not want to lose their positions which are supposed to be replaced by professional librarians according to the current Library and Reading Promotion Law.

At present, the number of public libraries in Korea are 437. They can be categorized by operation bodies as follows:

Division		Authorities	Office of Education	city, district, division	private	total
		No. of libraries	In operation Under Construction total	221 3 224	133 64 197	16 0 16
Major Operation Body		Office of Education (city, province)	Administrative departments (city, district, division)	Individuals. Corporations		

When the Library and Reading Promotion Law was passed in 1991, a 5-year grace period was left out to replace administrative officials gradually with professional librarians for the director's positions. The Korean Library Association and the National Central Library had provided special programs for public library directors holding an administrative status to give them an opportunity to get a librarians' status. Since Jan. 1996, no one with administrative status should be remained in the director's position according to the present Law. As of Jan. 1999, only 13 out of 21 public library directors in Seoul have been replaced by professional librarians and remaining 8 directors with administrative status are subject to replace immediately.

I believe, it was an intention of the Office of Education in Seoul that if City Assembly passed the bylaw which allows name changes of the Public Libraries to the Lifetime Learning Institutes basing on a new bill of Lifetime Education, those public library directors with administrative status at present can remain in the positions without violating the Section 24 of the Library and Reading Promotion Law. Furthermore, they can eventually secure all the public libraries in Seoul with directors holding administrative status. What I am also afraid of is that other local governments throughout the country might follow a precedent of Seoul's case.

### 3.3 Objections against the assertions of the Office of Education

The assertions of the Office of Education are supported by the logic that the new education system leading the new knowledgeable society or globalization of the 21st century should be centered upon "open education" and "lifetime learning Therefore", public libraries where, they think, lifetime

educations are taking place could be replaced with the Lifetime Learning Institute in order to expand chances of learning and training for people in the community.

Our arguments against the above allegations are as follows:

1) Lifetime education is one of the major functions of all public libraries.

One of early American pedagogist, Alvin Johnson, was requested by the American Adult Education Association to analyze activities of American public libraries. His study had reached the conclusion that public libraries could be defined as "People's University." As also written in the UNESCO's charter of the public library, the lifetime education has been one of major functions of the library for a long time. In Korea, the Library & Reading Promotion Law also defines the public library as follows:

Section 2 (definition)

item 4: the purpose of a public library is to promote use of information, cultural activities and lifetime education for the public.

Section 20 (job)

item 5: public libraries fulfill such works as lectures, appreciation of music, reading programs, and other activities of culture and lifetime education.

Section 21 (establishment and support of public libraries)

item 1: Central or local governments should establish and support public libraries for the provision of information, local development and lifetime education as provided by the President.

As defined in the Law, lifetime education is, by all means, one of major functions of public libraries.

2) A variety of programs for lifetime education has already been conducted by public libraries.

The statistics of various activities offered by 21 public libraries in Seoul shows :

- educational activities (lectures, seminars, etc) : held 8,444 times with total participants of 230,104 in the year 1996
- exhibitions : held 4,021 times with participants of 4,729 in the year 1995
- reading programs and discussions : held 672 times with 33,011 participants in the year 1995

By all means, it would be more reasonable for the Office of Education to strengthen libraries'

present lifetime education programs instead of replacing public libraries with lifetime learning institutes.

3) If the name of public library had to be changed to strengthen lifetime education for the public, shouldn't other public institutes where lifetime education programs are taking place change all their names to Lifetime Learning Institute ?

As a matter of fact, lifetime education programs are going on at different institutions of different places with various forms everyday. According to their own recent statistics which appeared in the home page of the Ministry of Education, the total number of institutions within the boundary of Seoul city providing lifetime educations is 1,746 including public libraries, social welfare centers, missionary education institutes, adolescent centers, women welfare counseling centers, university social education institutes, art galleries etc. By their logic, they should have changed the name of all institutes mentioned above to Lifetime Learning Institute. Could it be possibly done?

4) We found no differences of job descriptions between that of public libraries and Lifetime Learning Institutes defined in the bylaw. A comparative table is as follows:

#### **Job Descriptions defined by the bylaw**

<b>Public Library</b>	<b>Lifetime Learning Institute</b>
1. items concerning cultural activities	1. items concerning lifetime learning and cultural support
2. operations of educational materials	2. operations of educational counseling
3. items concerning circulation	3. items concerning circulation and reading
4. instructions of reading guidance	4. instructions of reading guidance
5. operations of branch libraries	5. operations of branch libraries
6. other items recommended by the superintendent of education	6. other items recommended by the superintendent of education

#### 4. Conclusions

An attempt of the Office of Education to put public libraries out of existence in Korea is no doubt against the current library policies that the central government has been carrying on. The Ministry of Education has held a public hearing on "Education Policy to Improve Reading Education" on November 24, 1998. And the Ministry of Culture and Tourism is pushing hard to construct more public libraries according to the short and long term plans. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism is now constructing 67 new public libraries with prospect of constructing 550 by the year 2003, and 750 by the year 2011, that will make a ratio of 1 public library per 60,000 persons. At the same time, the ratio of number of book per person by the year 2000 will be 0.5 book per 1 person and 1.0 book per 1 person by the year 2011. It is absolutely undesirable for both central government and local government to go ahead in opposite directions.

Now, all members of the Korean Library Association will fight to stop a movement of killing public libraries in Korea. We do not want to leave any indelible stain on a history of Korean librarianship

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# 목록의 이해

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