

## Conversation with Roger L. Janelli

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*Roger L. Janelli, professor of Folklore and Ethnomusicology and of East Asian Languages and Cultures at Indiana University, Bloomington, retired in May 2007. Below he shares his experiences and thoughts on the anthropology of Korea.*

**Roger L. Janelli:** When I was a graduate student, the anthropology of East Asia consisted largely of studies authored by those who devoted their energies to China or to Japan, though they were often familiar with the major works in each other's areas. Institutional bases for the anthropology of Korea and other fields of Korean studies were only beginning in the United States, and those who obtained their degrees in the mid to late 70s faced a very uncertain job market.

The Korean-language anthropology of Korea had barely begun as well. During the 1950s, most Korean people were still recovering from the devastating Korean War, but by the late 1950s and early 60's, a few pioneering rural sociologists and folklorists visited Korean villages and reported their findings. The discipline can be said to have been formally established with their creation of the Korean Society for Cultural Anthropology in 1959. A major survey of Korea's provinces, sponsored by the South Korean government and undertaken largely by the members of that society, began in the late 1960s. Their reports and some Japanese-language ethnographies done in the colonial period laid the basic foundations for Korean ethnography in South Korea.

Most of us from the United States who entered the field in that era had acquired some familiarity with the English-language anthropological work done in China and Japan and found them useful for finding points of departure for understanding Korea.

Over the almost 40 years that I've been engaged in the field, the anthropology of Korea, and Korean studies in general, has grown enormously, both in South Korea and in the United States.

The field has also undergone major shifts of emphases, from farming villages to urban life, from an almost exclusive focus on the perspectives of men to an inclusion of women, from a nearly restricted focus on long-term residents in Korea to an inclusion of

the Korean diaspora and, more recently, ethnic minorities - guest workers or wives of Korean men. And, scholarly standards in the field have risen.

**SLG:** What kind of relationships do you have towards your earlier work?

**RLJ:** One expects earlier work to inform later research, but it may also happen that later research gives new meanings to earlier experiences. In the village my wife and I studied in the 1970s, for example, we never noticed that village residents rarely represented themselves as Korean. Instead, most called themselves "persons of our village" or referred to themselves as members of a kin group. Only after we started our fieldwork in a major conglomerate, where workers constantly used a national term of reference, did we come to appreciate its earlier absence. And after television entered the village, we noticed during our return visits that its residents too had begun to refer to themselves as "we Koreans."

**SLG:** What recommendations do you have for developing more collaborative relations between scholars of Korean Anthropology based in the US and those elsewhere?

**RLJ:** My earliest training and mentoring in this field were obtained from South Korean scholars, especially my wife's father, Yim Suk-jay, her former teachers, and a number of senior folklorists. They not only provided encouragement but also generously shared their knowledge and understandings, from which I have benefited a great deal. Perhaps that's why a major hope for the anthropology of Korea would be increasing communication between scholars located in South Korea and those based beyond its borders. The Japanese community of anthropologists working on Korea may have developed better ties with Korean anthropologists, but no matter where one is based the publications of Korean anthropologists ought to be given greater recognition today. I am often concerned that a number of Korea-based anthropologists attend the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, but few outside Korea are members of the Korean Society for Cultural Anthropology or attend its annual meetings. I worry that this a manifestation of intellectual imperialism to which anthropologists ought to be especially sensitive and hope that it can be abridged or eliminated entirely.

**SLG:** Thank you Dr. Janelli for your service to anthropology and the anthropology of Korea. Thank you for the devotion and guidance you have shown to the students here at Indiana.

**Sue-Je Lee Gage** is a postdoctoral fellow in Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, funded by the Korea Foundation. She completed her degree from Indiana University and is currently editing her dissertation titled, *Pure Mixed Blood: The Multiple Identities of Amerasians in South Korea*, for publication.

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