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No Frame to Fit It All: An Autoethnography on Teaching Undergraduate Korean Studies, on and off the Peninsula

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In the past two decades, Korean Studies has expanded to become an interdisciplinary and increasingly international field of study and research. While new undergraduate Korean Studies programs are opening at universities in the Republic of Korea (ROK) and intensifying multi-lateral knowledge transfers, this process also reveals the lack of a clear identity that continues to haunt the field. In this autoethnographic essay, I examine the possibilities and limitations of framing Korea as an object of study for diverse student audiences, looking towards potential futures for the field. I focus on 1) the struggle to escape the nation-state boundaries implied in the habitual terminology, particularly when teaching in the ROK, where the country is unmarked ("Han'guk"), the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is marked ("Pukhan"), and the diaspora is rarely mentioned at all; 2) the implications of the expansion of Korean Studies as a major within the ROK; 3) in-class navigations of Korean national pride, the trap of Korean uniqueness and (self-)orientalization and

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attitudes toward the West; 4) the negotiation of my own status as a white American researching/teaching about Korea, often to Koreans; 5) reactions to the (legitimate) demands of undergraduate Korean Studies majors to define the field and its future employment opportunities. Finally, I raise some questions about teaching methodologies in Korean Studies. Drawing on my experiences with diverse groups of students, I ask those involved in this field to consider with me the challenges emerging in a time of rapid growth.

Keywords: Korean Studies, pedagogy, classroom, auto-ethnography, *Han'gukhak*

Vignette

I own a flag of the Republic of Korea— I acquired it to wave enthusiastically during the national high of the 2002 World Cup, and being proud of my adopted country, I have kept it ever since. In 2014, it was hanging from the bookcase behind my desk at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (HUFS). That was the year HUFS founded an undergraduate department of Korean Studies—the first such program in Korea, despite the long existence of graduate Korean Studies programs on the peninsula. As the inaugural professor in the HUFS Korean Studies undergraduate department, I had spent half a year preparing curriculum, pamphlets, and courses for the entering class. One cold but sunny day in March, shortly after classes had begun, three of my students stood in front of me, enthusiastically asking me to lend them my flag. They wanted to wave the flag to represent the Department of Korean Studies in a small interdepartmental athletic competition. Perhaps the reader can imagine the discomfort I experienced in that moment. I explained the issue as well as I could to the students, who had seen students majoring in Italian wave the flag of Italy, Spanish majors wave the flag of Spain, Chinese majors wave the flag of the People's Republic of China, and so on. Established departments that combined multiple languages had already designed their own flags. "*Urinŭn Taehan min'gukhakkwa ka anigo, Han'guk hakkwayeyo*" [We're not the Department of Republic of Korea Studies. We're the Department of Korean Studies], I explained, but for my students, who had just begun their first semester, there was no difference between Korean Studies and ROK Studies. Now, looking back on that first semester, I realize that I was beginning one long process of delimiting, for my students, what exactly "Korean Studies"—their university major—was.[1] Of showing them a different way to look at Korea. Of worrying with them what they would do after graduation.

[1] At my urging, a suitable flag, modeled on the unification flag and similar to that held aloft by the joint Korean team at the Pyeongchang Olympics, was designed and put into use as the departmental logo.

Introduction

In 2006, I finished my MA in Korean Studies, and after two years learning from professors I respected greatly, I thought I knew what Korean Studies meant, and also what my own future in Korean Studies could mean. My professors assured me that I was doctoral program material, that I should carry on their legacy, that there were many jobs for bright people with a thorough understanding of Korea. After two years mostly lurking on the Korean Studies Discussion Listserv, where conference announcements, job openings, and requests for information are forwarded to anyone who registers an email address, I believed them. I did not understand the disciplinary politics, the importance of who wrote your recommendation letters, the trickle-down hiring (your job will be at an institution ranked equal to or lower than where you received your graduate education), or the fact that the academic job market in North America was, just then, going belly-up and shifting to the exploitative adjunct-heavy model we see today. I understood Korean Studies as the study of Korea—unique, particular, and unjustly ignored—and I believed that someday I would pass on knowledge and inspire students just like the Yonsei faculty. I knew in my heart that I would be a "Han'guk munhwa sŏn'gyosa" [missionary of Korean culture].

Since finishing my MA, my confidence in my understanding of what Korean Studies is has been shaken. Despite searching for a job in "Korean Studies" and identifying as a "Koreanist," I know that the definition is unclear—and cannot simply be the study of anything about Korea. The longer I identify as a Koreanist, attend Korean Studies conferences, publish in Korean Studies journals, and teach Korean Studies classes, the more I realize that this field remains poorly defined. Although my goal in this piece is to address the challenges of teaching Korean Studies in different contexts, I must first admit that the ambiguity, contestation, and ultimately lack of clarity about what "Korean Studies" is plays out in two realms: between researchers in professional activities and institutionally. I am not the first to worry through these issues, but the solutions proposed in the past no longer fit the present conditions of Korean Studies. I see two overarching reasons for this ambiguity: first, Korean and non-Korean scholars often participate in different conversations and ignore each other's research output; and second the pressures that scholars face. Outside Korea scholars must assert their relevance to their own universities or departments while appealing for funding that primarily comes from inside Korea. Inside Korea publication point systems can prevent scholars from cooperating on big international projects, or taking on large book-length studies. These reasons, however, are issues for another paper; here I want to address the teaching of Korean Studies.

How do we teach Korean Studies? Who wants to learn? What challenges do we face as we teach? How is all of this impacted by our student populations and our own background? My thoughts on teaching in this field on one hand return to old questions that everyone in Korean Studies has asked, and on the other hand ask Koreanists, collectively, to consider our teaching again in the context of increased interest in Korean Studies and a shifting field.

Autoethnographic Lessons from Teaching Korean Studies

I have taught Korean Studies classes in five contexts. One is my current position in Canada, where I teach mixed ethnicity courses that most of my students take as electives, while a few earn Asian Studies credits. I have also taught students majoring in Korean Studies at the BA (HUFS) and MA (Korea University) level, as well as classes on Korea for non-majors at the doctoral level (Korea University) and as part of summer programs for Dankook University (American college students) and the Center for International Education and Exchange (American high school students). These teaching experiences inform my understanding of the possibilities and limitations of framing Korea as an object of study for diverse student audiences.

What Korea are we studying?

First we must ask what Korea we are studying. What do students expect to learn about (which) "Korea"? Returning to the vignette with which I began this article, within Korea there is a clear tendency to consider Korean Studies (*Han'gukhak*) to be the study of the Republic of Korea (*Taehan min'guk*), rather than the study of the peninsula and the diasporic Korean populations.[2] The ROK is unmarked—in everyday conversations no one calls it *namhan* (South + Korea); it is always *Han-guk* (Korea + Nation). Meanwhile, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is *Pukhan* (North + Korea) to the people in the ROK and *Chosŏn* (the name Korea used before it was colonized and divided) to the people in the DPRK (who call the south *Nam Chosŏn*).

Diasporic populations are a peripheral or absent concern for Koreans in Korea, with implications for Korean Studies. The existence of some Koreans in Russia (*Koryŏin*) is the most likely to be known due to a well-known sports star, Viktor Ahn, who competed for the ROK, was cut from the team, and became a Russian in 2011 to compete (and win) in the 2014 Olympics. An older generation may be aware of the influential late Russian rocker Victor Zoi [also spelled Viktor Tsoi, d. 1990]. Even the words for diasporic populations are in flux in Korea, with the previous terms such as *Chosŏnjok* and *chaeil kyop'o* being replaced in some circles with *Chungguk tongp'o,* and *chaeil tongp'o.* As important as these diasporic populations are, even outside Korea they are underrepresented in Korean Studies. At least in the North American context, the existence of Asian American Studies divides efforts and attention so that Korean Studies scholars leave issues of Korean-Americans to the scholars in Asian-American Studies, who do not examine diasporic populations outside North America, such as *zainichi* Koreans in Japan. In recent years, solid if piecemeal scholarship has emerged on diasporic Koreans, but there is still a deficit of literature for use in Korean Studies classrooms.[3]

[2] In fact, in the past, Korean Studies was even called *kukhak* or nation + study (the implication of course being that the nation is the ROK) (see Jeong 2009, 320).

[3] Some of the publications I have used in my own classes when I teach about the diaspora include Grace Cho (2008), Han Gil-soo (2015), Ahn Jihyun (2018), and Kwon June-hee (2015), in addition I often assign Paul Chang and Andrea Kim Cavicchi (2015) to explain contemporary politics surrounding Korean adoptees.

Fortunately scholars are not ignoring the emergence of ethnic non-Korean populations in the Republic of Korea—marriage migrants and their children, as well as populations of workers of non-Korean origins (the literature primarily addresses sex workers and foreign factory workers), have appeared in recent books and articles.[4] These populations are subtly changing the future of the ROK and now, with 2 percent of the people in the ROK being foreign-born, they must become part of the study of Korea as well.

In teaching Korean Studies, we gift our students with a perspectival shift away from the focus on the prosperous populations in fancy Seoul districts a nationalistic perspective would prefer. Whenever it is relevant to our courses, we help our students to understand the DPRK, the multicultural shift in the ROK, and the global Korean diaspora. Korean Studies classrooms outside the ROK are doing a much better job with this than those within it, but material that addresses the diaspora as a whole and helps scholars working in other areas to get a handle on this very complex topic would certainly help. As long as Korean Studies can be functionally confined to the study of the pre-modern peninsula and the contemporary ROK, then it is small wonder that my students would want to wave the Republic of Korea's flag to represent a Korean Studies department.

The Expansion of Korean Studies within Korea

Incidents such as my eager flag wavers are only possible because in the last few years we have seen the emergence of Korean undergraduate programs in Korean Studies (*Han'gukhak*, or at some universities, *Kŭllobal Han'gukhak*), and the attendant concerns that are raised by these programs. Until 2014 when HUFS opened their Korean Studies undergraduate program, there was no undergraduate Korean Studies major in Korea. There are also now undergraduate Korean Studies or Global Korean programs at Ewha (2015; primarily in English), Sogang (2015; English), Sunmoon (2016; Korean), and a program was started at Kookmin University and then axed almost immediately. Graduate Korean Studies programs in Korea, including the program where I earned my MA, have been around for decades, but undergraduates until now have majored in history, literature, or some other field. As the inaugural professor in Korean Studies at HUFS, I was able to experience directly the ways that different parties within Korean universities view such programs. I believe that the case of HUFS is a relatively strong example— although the order of events and the particular details would be different at another institution, the problems with Korean Studies programs are going to be similar at other schools.

At HUFS the program was founded to be taught in English to facilitate examining Korea from an outsiders' perspective and to draw international undergraduates to the program,

[4] See for example Kim Yeongok (2007), Yun Injin (2008), and Paik Young-Gyung (2011) on Korea's new multiculturalism, or Kim Hyun-sil and Kim Hun-soo (2013) that addresses struggles of foreign brides in Korea. Lee Jin-kyung (2010) and Sealing Cheng (2010) have recently published books on migrant sex work. Han Kyung-koo (2007) is also useful to either introduce or use a Korean voice to disprove the idea of Korea as a racially pure country.

which would theoretically increase foreign enrollment at the school. There was a strong sense of building individuals who could, with HUFS foreign language training, promote Korea to the world, an oft-held misconception about the point of Korean Studies. When a new university president was elected, the entire program was revamped—classes were in Korean, Korean faculty were hired, and the focus was shifted to training Koreans to teach Korean to foreign learners at the expense of credit hours devoted to learning about Korea. This shift was driven by a renewed emphasis on providing a path to employment for students of Korean universities, a point addressed later in this article.

Internationalization of Universities in Korea

The ROK has pushed for the internationalization of universities in a variety of ways: foreign professors, foreign students, and more courses taught in foreign languages, particularly English, are seen as markers of being a modern, advanced, top-class institution to such an extent that the Korean government's university rankings take them into account. There are entire programs taught only in English, and one university, the Korean Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST), one of the top schools in the country, taught all courses in English for several years. After a number of student suicides attributed to stress partially from a GPA requirement and partially from learning in English, the policy was changed.[5] English fever has long been a burden on both Korean professors and students, yet university administrators push for it to pursue the entangled goals of higher rankings and more international students. Many of the most successful universities have also established international colleges or graduate schools catering to foreign students and the type of Koreans who may otherwise leave Korea to study.[6]

The presence of foreign professors and foreign students is desired, but treatment of foreign staff and students, once on campus, varies widely. Each university visibly foregrounds foreign faculty and students on its website and in print materials, even when they are a small fraction of the campus population and may be disenfranchised in invisible ways. Foreign interest in Korean culture feeds national pride, and with the recent popularity of Korean pop culture internationally, founding Korean Studies programs is seen as a way to attract additional foreign students. However, the students who choose an undergraduate in Korea are not primarily from English speaking countries and are not always able to use English as well as Korean classmates. Korean Studies majors come from diverse corners of the linguistic map so that the language of instruction immediately becomes problematic. These foreign students could, with intensive Korean language training for their initial semesters in Korea, join courses taught to Korean students in Korean and be achieving fluency in Korean while they learn about the country—however this makes time-to-degree swell, so most programs

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[5] For more details on the KAIST scandal, see http://tech.mit.edu/V131/N26/kaist.suicides.html. In 2013, KAIST professors protested against the English-only policy, which was subsequently scrapped: http://v.media.daum.net/v/20130820192906834. However, KAIST's suicides continue with 11 as of 2016, according to an article in *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, http://english.khan.co.kr/khan_art_view.html?artid=201607251827247&code=710100. All accessed on 9/17/2017.

[6] See Stephanie Kim (2018) for an interesting account of the politics of elitism on Korean campuses.

allow only one academic year of Korean language instruction—if students are beginners, this is only enough training for native speakers of Chinese or Japanese.

The interest in foreign students at Korean universities, unfortunately, is often more in the percentage of students admitted and enrolled than in how they cope after they have been admitted. As an example of the difficulties they face, the dormitories at most universities require foreign students to move four times per year—for housing during vacations (which Korean students usually do not need) and during semesters. Foreign students also experience abundant administrative challenges in systems created for Korean students, ranging from the predictable to the indignity of misgendering my former student on their transcript.[7]

Korean Studies and Internationalization

I strongly support the existence of Korean Studies undergraduate classes or even programs in Korea, and I encourage teaching anyone who wants to learn, but it is false to assume that Korean Studies is only a topic for foreign students. Studying Korea is beneficial for Korean students, because the assumption that one understands one's own culture has been proven false by every reflective person who has ever left their hometown and tried to explain (if even to themselves) why things are different back home from in the new location. For Korean students who have spent years studying for the *sunŭng* (college entrance exam), Korean Studies classes offer the chance to actually enjoy learning about their own culture. Furthermore students aiming toward careers in public service, in the media, in diplomacy, or with any type of frequent international contact will be better prepared after deep and analytical study of their own county.

Korean Uniqueness, National Pride and Attitude Towards the West

Populations become attached to symbols like flags as part of a demonstration of uniqueness and difference vis-à-vis others. Teaching about Korea to Canadian and international students in Canada has been a learning experience. I teach a popular 120-student lecture course in which the majority of my students are ethnically East Asian, but fewer than 10% have Korean citizenship (including overseas Koreans, the classroom may include 20% students of Korean descent). The students are primarily ethnically Chinese, accounting for approximately 50 percent of the enrollees. The remaining 30 percent includes students with South and Southeast Asian family names and facial features and a handful of non-Asian students. The majority of my students, however, including the Korean students, are completely onboard with an interpretation of Korea as unique—maybe even a little crazy, as their gaze turns to the DPRK. This uniqueness has been reinforced by common narratives in non-scholarly explanations of Korean culture. But an emphasis on things like the ROK's breaking the mold in the speed of industrial modernization ("the Miracle on the Han") are

[7] My transgender UBC student went on exchange to Korea. The student's documents including passport gender the student as male, but the exchange program's transcripts stated that the student was female, outraging the student after the documents turned up an error in UBC's system and the student became aware of the issue.

actually a perfect opportunity for Korean Studies scholars to fight the uniqueness narrative: what did "compressed modernity" (Chang 1999) cost the ROK? Can human rights abuses on a massive scale be excused if they occur during a massive shift to a more affluent society? How did we transition from a relatively level playing field (as shown by the gini coefficient) during Park's presidency to the chilling lack of hope for the future represented by narratives like *Hel Chosŏn* and *op'o sedae* when his daughter became president?[8]

Non-Korean students may be looking for the exotic and extraordinary—they may want Korea to titillate. In areas like Korean folklore and religion, some of the traditional ideas and even ongoing practices are, in fact, colorful and spectacular. The extremes of the world of K-pop idols and the dramatic popular movements to achieve (and preserve) democracy are exciting and filled with real-life drama. In teaching on Korea outside the peninsula, we must perpetually balance fascinating hooks—the references to BTS and Big Bang that those of us who conduct research on contemporary Korea can use to make deeper points about Korean culture, while hooking large student audiences—with the need to also teach the mundane. Students must embark on mastery of the language, as well as studying subjects from history to the economy.

Inside the ROK, Korean Studies seems to be about examining national success stories and staying away from controversy. Many Korean universities are inherently risk-averse, knowing that historical matters can attract unwanted attention from the National Assembly in a way that can inflame netizen passions and flatten scholarly nuance.[9] Modern Korean history is still such a sensitive topic that I was hired to teach it to foreign (and some Korean) graduate students in Korean Studies at Korea University. Asking a foreigner outside the tenure track to teach a required course may seem surprising, but it allowed sensitive and critical topics to be addressed without expecting a Korean professor to present too bold an approach or the "wrong" strong opinion. History has been a minefield in Korean Studies for decades—the 2018 Association for Asian Studies conference even included a panel on controversies in research on early Korean history. The controversies addressed can be boiled down to the continued vocal presence of people in the ROK (scholars and politicians) who are more concerned with a resolutely and completely nationalistic interpretation than with accuracy. As an example, my students (even the Koreans) were rarely more than generally aware that there had been a rebellion or massacre on Jeju Island. The foreign students had seldom heard of it at all. Despite the No Muhyŏn [Roh Moohyun] administration's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's findings, publications, and press, the tragedy is still barely mentioned in classrooms, even though there is an enduring critical attitude towards other

[8] *Hel Chosŏn* is a new descriptor for Korean society meant to capture the difficulty of achieving a stable and satisfying life in a competitive system with high youth unemployment, the related term *op'o sedae* refers to the generation (*sedae*) that have given up on five things (*op'o*): romance, buying a home, getting married, having children, and even finding a job.

[9] The 2015 case of professor Park Yuha or Sejong University, who received negative attention for publishing a book on the comfort women is a good example—an overview is available at http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2017/11/22/park-yuha-and-the-uncomfortable-realities-of-south-korean-democracy/. An explanation of why Park was charged is available at http://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/2118358/south-korean-professor-fined-book-about-comfort-women-proving. Both accessed on 4/17/2018.

actions by then-president Yi Sŭngman [Rhee Syngman]. Korean national pride encourages everyone to learn, again and again, about King Sejong at museums, at historic sites, and even in public plazas like Kwanghwamun [Gwanghwamun]. Yet where are the sites of modern Korean history that do not highlight Korean heroism or victimization?[10] Why is public knowledge of shameful histories not publicly addressed in a country that demands public contrition for past offenses against Korea by outsiders?[11]

Strangely, even though nationalism is clearly visible in Korea and in Korean Studies (or certainly in ROK-backed funding for Korean Studies) there is also an undercurrent of what John Lie calls "South Korea's embarrassing cultural subservience to the United States and especially white Americans" (2016, 27). On the one hand, Korean Studies is accused of caring only about Korea, of being so wrapped up in the particularities and details of Korea that the research produced is only worthwhile to those that care about Korea. On the other hand, theories, generally written by Caucasian men, are held up as "important" ideas that must be engaged with by scholars of Korea. The deference with which famous Western scholars are treated has resulted in some odd bedfellows; for example, a recent book uses the psychological theories advanced by Freud and Jung to explain the traditional dance *salp'uri* (c.f. Lee and Kim 2017). Yet theories that explain the United States or France do not always work well for Korea or other small, successful post-colonial countries. John Lie has even claimed that social science research on the West, couched as representative and universally applicable, does not "advance our knowledge of Asia in any substantial way" (2012:10). This means that social science scholars of Korea are tasked with producing scholarship that demonstrates social science chops to the social scientists surrounding them, while still advancing knowledge of Korea and Asia. This work may not easily get published in top social science journals, according to Paul Chang, David Kang, and Jordan Siegel, presenting the latest data from the fields of Sociology, International Relations, and Business at the *Future Visions in Korean Studies* conference held at Stanford in November 2018.

Korean Studies balances national pride (such as the Korean undergraduate urge to wave a flag) and claims of uniqueness on the one hand with deference to well-known and established perspectives that do not help explain Korea on the other. It is only in moving beyond this either/or scenario that we can find our future.

An Outsider's Perspective and Teaching about Korea

Being a white American teaching about Korea, often to Koreans, brings another set of challenges. The presence of Korean heritage students or Koreans is more common in the North American classroom than elsewhere outside Korea. An informal poll of the "Koreanist" Facebook group easily confirmed that those in North America often experience mixed

[10] A chapter by Codruta Sintionean in a volume on the invention of Korean tradition, forthcoming in late 2019 or early 2020, explores exactly this point.

[11] In all fairness, Korean activists (not the government) have apologized for Korean actions in the Vietnam War, for example.

classrooms—in some instances a classroom in the United States or Canada can hold over 70 percent ethnically Korean students—while those in countries such as the Netherlands, Australia, Germany, and Denmark remarked that they had almost no students of Korean heritage.

My teaching experiences range from classes with only Korean students to a class of all-but-one non-Korean students. Any non-Korean teaching Korean studies particularly to Koreans or diasporic Koreans can attest that we must carefully demonstrate qualifications in a way that satisfies the students while acknowledging their lived experience. In Korea, the first lesson or two may include some awkward moments when students ask me if I "know Chŏnju [Jeonju]," as if I could teach Korean Studies without being familiar with Korea's geography and major cities. I generally find it is not hard to get past this initial stage by explaining the length of time I have lived in Korea as an adult (approaching sixteen years out of the last twenty-one), but my own lingering discomfort is not so easily dispelled. How can I be an ally and empower colleagues and students without taking advantage of the remnants of a power structure that has seen white people teaching Koreans what they know and believe Koreans *should* know since missionaries first arrived in Korea? To what degree am I benefitting from a long-held deference to foreign perspectives combined with the self-affirmation of having the "other" acknowledge "your" country's greatness? The last thing I want to do is tell Koreans how to understand their own country, yet my years in Korea, my extensive reading, and my MA and PhD focused on Korea do mean that I have thought at length about Korean society, both in the past and in the present. I often explain my lessons as creating a scaffolding on which students can hang their existing knowledge—knowledge that in particular nodes may be more extensive than my own. As an instructor in Korean Studies, it is my job to lead students to examine everything they know or think they know in a deep and critical way, whether I am Korean or not.

Teaching a mixed classroom brings another challenge: sometimes my foreign students, perhaps without realizing they are doing this, look to my Korean students for confirmation of my lessons. This is naturally most common in the first few class meetings, and my age and gender also factor into this dynamic. The perception that a Korean will know more, either as a student or as an instructor in Korean Studies, is strong. This further connects to placement in this field as academics or administrators may doubt a non-Korean voice, or see it as competition. However, having or adopting an outsider perspective allows a scholar to avoid the associative leaps that Koreans make when observing Korean culture, and teaching Korean students is often about helping students to see how outsiders will not make that same leap. For example, the ethnomusicologist Katherine Lee has explained how the Korean government scrapped the popular tourism slogan "Dynamic Korea," fearing that the association of Korea with the dynamic drumbeats that underpinned the advertisements would evoke the image of a Korea full of demonstrations and strife (2015). The associative leap from *p'ungmul* drumbeats to demonstrations is one that older Koreans readily make but that foreigners (the presumed target of the tourism campaigns) would not. Although being an outsider can have disadvantages, the perspectival gift of looking at Korea from outside has been invaluable as I framed Korea for foreign learners and readers, and as I designed my

ethnographic research.

This is why, although teaching Korean Studies in English seems unnecessarily Anglo-centric, courses on Korea in a foreign language (not necessarily English) are very useful. The distance imposed by a foreign language allows students interested in using knowledge of Korea to interpret Korean things to non-Koreans to learn while constantly envisioning themselves communicating with people of a differing cultural background. They are able to practice formulating ideas about Korea without the inherent assumed knowledge contained within the Korean language. Practice explaining Korean cultural concepts clearly using a foreign language can be built into every class and assignment. Korean students will find learning in Korean more comfortable, but my former students also appreciated the benefits of study in a foreign language.

Student Employability with a Korean Studies Degree

The benefits of studying Korea are different for Koreans and foreigners. Koreans get to know themselves, become more deeply reflexive and self-aware, and develop a love of the nation that goes beyond ethnicity or knee-jerk nationalism. For non-Koreans, studying Korean Studies means learning to see things in a completely different manner. Cultural differences and new perspectives will meet them constantly, just like a visit to the War Memorial of Korea can be a challenging experience for nationals of the US, China, or other countries that have been involved in wars on Korean soil. Coming to understand Korea as a non-Korean requires significant challenges to oneself and one's assumptions about the world. It develops an open and analytical mind. However, none of this guarantees a future job.

What should be expected of a graduate from a Korean Studies program? A graduate from a Korean Studies program should be able to, in a nuanced manner, represent Korean history and culture without exploiting differences, (self-)orientalizing, over-simplifying, or being limited by disciplinary boundaries. She should be capable of explaining broad concepts and illustrating them with specific in-depth examples from history or the present day. She should have a detailed transnational conception of Korea's place in the world, and a strong comparative framework. She should be able to able to analyze complex and uncomfortable social issues, or if she wants to represent Korea, she should be prepared to do so in one or more foreign language, showing reasonable pride but not bias. Likewise, graduate students at foreign institutions studying Korea should do at least part of their training in Korea, not merely while conducting dissertation research, but through exchange programs, language programs, or work-learn opportunities.

In Korea today young people are deeply concerned about future employability—educational inflation has eroded the advantages of completing only a bachelor's degree, and youth unemployment is high.[12] The Korean public, accustomed to viewing education as the key to good jobs, expects universities to solve this problem, instead of realizing that the

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[12] To learn more I recommend one of the best recent articles on educational inflation in Korea by Kim Doohwan and Choi Yool (2015).

vast majority of people simply cannot find a white collar job or recognizing that the role of undergraduate education is not generally job training. Not only is this currently a significant society-wide concern in Korea, but since Korean Studies is a new field for undergraduate education, students and parents find it even harder to imagine the future of enrollees. This is why HUFS' program began as a Korean studies program but two years later transitioned into a hybrid Korean studies and Korean language teachers' program, where those who took the latter option lost a chance to take more Korea-focused content classes. HUFS essentially chose to prioritize the chance to improve students' "specs" (measurable qualifications to assist in getting hired) through the language teaching certificate at the cost of studying about Korea in a foreign language.

Programs, particularly in the ROK, cannot ignore the very real concerns of students regarding future employability. As Korea gains ever more recognition on the world stage, it is graduates from Korean Studies programs who can use their education to represent Korea and educate the world about the country. However, it is not for university professors and administrators to develop types of positions that do not exist yet, but for graduates to seek out the best way to use their own skills and capabilities as the world becomes interested in Korea in ways that could not have been dreamed of a decade ago.

Teaching Methodologies on and off the Peninsula

One of the largest problems with teaching Korean Studies outside Korea is that students have limited access to Korean resources. Guest speakers for class are limited by budgets and transportation time, and field trips are almost impossible outside a few large metropolitan areas. Students have difficulty conducting research, too. Although they can do online surveys, or even Internet-assisted interviews (via video calling or through typed messages), and they can analyze content that has been published or distributed online, their options for conducting direct original research are limited. This is exactly why we see so many studies on international fans of Korean popular culture—those international fans are just right down the street from the person writing the article (e.g. Williams and Ho 2016; Jin and Yoon 2014; Sung 2013; Hubinette 2012). Teaching about contemporary Korea can be even more fraught, as the reality of life in contemporary Korea is shifting in ways that can be time-consuming or impossible to follow from the other side of an ocean. Keeping up with academic trends and reading the latest disciplinary research while trying to gain funding for frequent trips to Korea and constantly monitoring relevant online activity can be exhausting. How can additional opportunities be created for students to engage with contemporary Korea from overseas? Using digital resources effectively becomes an essential part of effective teaching on contemporary Korea in these cases, but this often requires instructors to widen their skill set.

Research within Korea is only limited by time and commitment to the subject. Of course, there are infinitely more opportunities to enrich class with guest speakers, field trips,

and activities. When I was teaching students who spoke Korean fluently, I could require them to read the newspaper to search for designated ongoing topics (social and political hot topics that young people would otherwise ignore, like the elderly in Korea and the previous administration's poorly articulated "creative economy"). Students in my modern Korean history class were required to interview their grandparents or other elderly people about living under Rhee Syngman, an era about which few young people know. Students went to Buddha's birthday celebrations, visited palaces, and interviewed museum curators. They accessed special research centers, tracked down a movie director for an interview, learned to play traditional instruments, and enjoyed specialist guest speakers, even though my campus was two hours by public transit from Seoul.

Many professors are bound by training that has caused them to consider only a limited number of activities and modes for teaching and learning. Since Area Studies courses have not traditionally been taught in the area of study, this causes most people teaching Korean studies in Korea to overlook how students (and faculty) are embedded within the object of study, providing countless additional learning opportunities. Amazingly, most of the professors in Korea who teach about Korea use the exact same classroom techniques as professors teaching subjects completely unrelated to Korea.[13] Students read, discuss, write an essay or take an exam, and present their work. I know it is more taxing to prepare for a class that goes beyond what I can do myself. It is sometimes even more work to invite a guest speaker than it would be to brush up on the topic and perhaps show some video clips. The schools I have taught at never offered a budget for special lectures and I took that money out of my own pocket, but if my job is to help students to really understand, then I have to engage them, and nothing does that like shaking up the standard classroom.

Another advantage of teaching students in Korea who are able to use Korean is that no matter how poor their previous education has been, they have a skeletal knowledge of the cultural context. For example, if I want to talk about Kim Chiha, neither foreign nor (young) Korean students are likely to know who he is, but for foreign students to understand Kim Chiha's work, I must first explain the *minjung* cultural movement (as well as the desire for democratization and the abuses of power in the authoritarian era) and *p'ansori* as a genre (not to mention mask dance dramas). Only after that can I explain who Kim Chiha is, or why "Ojŏk" (Five bandits) was an important piece. Discussions with students with a basic Korean education can approach the meat of the matter more quickly. In fact, the level of detail addressed in a modern Korean history course I taught for first-year Korean students at HUFS was equivalent to what I taught at Korea University to MA students, many in a dual degree Korean Studies program from American University

[13] Notable exceptions exist, and I learned new techniques, found great assignment destinations, and exchanged special lecture opportunities with some of these professors. At HUFS, I was required to conduct advising sessions once per semester with each of my Korean Studies major students. I continue to actively mentor almost half of the 2014 entering class by email, Facebook, Skype, and when I am in Korea, personal meetings. Through these conversations, I learn about the classes they are taking and how the classes are taught. Again and again, students in Korea do not get special lectures, nor are they expected to visit special locations or do creative assignments. If they were studying in Ohio or Oslo, the course would be no different.

(in which most, though not all, were not Korean). While teaching the latter, I was able to include more time for analytical discussion—but this was primarily because I could speak faster and rely on higher reading comprehension of the required texts than when teaching Korean undergraduates.

Looking Towards the Future of Korean Studies

There are possibilities and limitations involved in framing Korea as an object of study for diverse student audiences, and they vary based on the students and the location of the class. The most important thing about this comparison of HUFS undergraduates and Korea University graduate students is that in February 2018, HUFS granted its first BA in *Han'gukhak*. The recipient of this degree will be followed by many more from HUFS and the other programs formed in the last few years. Due to educational inflation, many of these students can be expected to enter MA programs. If they continue on to graduate school in Korean Studies, they may be enrolling in the programs where readers of this article teach. This situation will continue to evolve as the educational environment shifts inside and outside Korea, but the largest shift will be due to two new types of graduate student who will soon make their presence felt. These students will be (1) trained in undergraduate Korean Studies (not Area Studies, but focused Korean Studies programs, many in Korea), or (2) part of the large pool of students who want to carry out research on popular culture. The next generation of graduate students may also come from undergraduate degrees in Communications or Media Studies, fields in which few established Korea-focused professors work comfortably. The few professors in those fields report a huge number of graduate student applicants seeking to work with them. Sooner or later, more Asian Studies departments will have to hire faculty qualified to mentor graduate students in popular culture research. With such a background, these students will push the entire field to new efforts—graduates of Korean Studies BA programs are more prepared than the previous generation of students, and the popular culture students enter institutions where "few Korean Studies professors are trained specifically in popular culture" (Armstrong 2014, 41).

As our field grows, this is one area where faculty must meet student interest. Although a handful of universities have hired Korean Studies specialists from diverse fields, including those conducting work on popular culture, this is still rare. It is great that universities are gradually realizing the need for permanent positions dedicated to teaching about contemporary Korea. However, just as schools in Korea must respond to concerns about employability, the increase in *hallyu* related positions is connected to a model of pleasing the consumer that is creeping into some North American universities. I would be remiss if I did not mention that serving these new student interests does not eliminate the need for painfully acquired knowledge (such as learning *hanja*, Korean sinographs). Classes on sinographs and pre-modern history are still necessary for training a future generation of Korean studies scholars—the expansion of pop culture offerings should not come at the

expense of education on pre-modern matters—as all my colleagues surely agree. But we cannot turn away the future of the field by offering classes on pop culture taught by scholars without the training or interest to do the topic justice.

Another area of growth is connected to the DPRK, with a slowly increasing number of positions, but abundant student interest. Writing this essay I listened to the Pyeongchang Olympic reporting repeatedly massacre the name of the host city, faced nearly daily inquiries from acquaintances about nuclear weapons and the intentions of the DPRK, and read nonsense alarmist scenarios with quotations from so-called experts on East Asian politics and security issues. Finishing revisions, the talks between Kim, Moon, and Trump continue to make headlines and it is clear that Koreanists are more needed to provide perspective and context than ever.

Conclusion

In closing, I would like to thank the reader for staying with me through this examination of teaching undergraduate Korean Studies. Although I have only taught post-Ph.D. for the past seven years, my experiences teaching Korean Studies both in the ROK and in Canada, in rapidly growing contexts, has provided a lens for exploring the future of undergraduate Korean Studies education. I am thankful to be in this field as it expands due to the abundant student interest in Korea. I hope that this interest can be sustained through avoiding pitfalls, carefully considering the changing student population, and continuing to build this complex interdisciplinary field.

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