

Remembering Prof. Choon-Min Kim: 1914-2010



Choon-Min Kim, Emeritus Professor of Seoul National University, the founder and first and second President of The Ecological Society of Korea, passed away on December 3, 2010, at the age of 96. All who knew him hoped Prof. Kim would live to be

a hundred, but tragically our hopes did not come to pass.

I was personally heartbroken to hear of Prof. Kim's death, as he was my adviser at the Graduate School of Education, Seoul National University. It was a profound honor for me that I was one of his students in Graduate School. For a long time, I did not visit him, and I regret that I did not pay my respects to him as frequently as I should have. There are simply not enough words to express the tragedy of his death.

Prof. Kim was born on January 3, 1914 in Gaepoong county, Kyunggi-do Province (presently Hwanghaebuk-do, North Korea). After he graduated from the Soongsil Technical College of Humanities (a university authorized by Japanese Colonial Government) in Pyongyang in March, 1937, Prof. Kim attended Tohoku Imperial University (presently Tohoku University) in Sendai, Japan.

His initial work as an undergraduate student concerned the ecophysiology of temporary wilting and permanent wilting by measurement of the turning point of water content in plant leaves. Prof. Kim's bachelor's thesis was titled "Ecological Study on Wilting of Morning Glory (*Pharbitis nil*) Plant Leaves." This paper was published in the journal *Ecological Review* 7(3): 148-154, 1941. Furthermore, his results regarding the turning point of wilting of the *Pharbitis nil* plant were cited and recorded in

the book "Plant Physiology" by Toru Sakamura, published by the Shokabo Publishing Company (Tokyo) in 1952.

Additionally, I know that Prof. Kim was quite fond of sports such as baseball and tennis while he was an undergraduate. He especially loved baseball. During my stay in Tohoku University as a Ph.D candidate, I heard that Prof. Kim was the pitcher, and Prof. Matsuo Kato--an insect ecologist and the 13th President of Tohoku University (1971-1977)--was the catcher on the Faculty of Science's baseball team when they were undergraduates. Tennis was also a sport he enjoyed, and it was generally acknowledged that Prof. Kim was a world-class player.

Shortly after graduating from Tohoku University in March 1940, Prof. Kim returned home and served in the Kyungseong and Gaesung middle schools as a teacher for three years, from 1940 to 1942. Later, the principal of Kyungseong middle school in Hamkyungbuk-do Province (presently North Korea) visited Prof. Kim's adviser, Prof. Dr. Yosetsu Yoshii, of Tohoku University in 1940, wishing to recommend him as a biology teacher. At that time, Prof. Yosetsu Yoshii was a famous young plant ecologist, and was the first to establish an academic department of Ecology in Japan. He confidently recommended Prof. Kim as a middle school teacher.

Seoul National University was founded in 1946, and lectures commenced on September 1, 1947. The first Dean of the College of Education was Dr. E-Wook Jang, first disciple of Chang-Ho Ahn, a Korean Independence Activist and later the 3rd President of Seoul National University. The Dean of the College of Education, Dr. Jang, decided to ask Prof. Kim if he would like to work with him in the College of Education; luckily for all involved, Kim accepted his proposal. Owing partly to his close relationship with Dr. Jang, Prof. Kim became the first Professor of the Department of Biology, College of Education, Seoul National University in November, 1946.

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At the Department of Biology Education, Prof. Kim taught classes for 33 years, and retired in September, 1980. He was consistently proud of the legacy of his graduate students, and most of his students currently hold faculty positions in universities throughout the nation.

What is especially noteworthy about Prof. Kim is that he was the first Professor to ever teach Ecology in a Korean university. Despite some financial difficulties, Prof. Kim founded The Ecological Society of Korea (ESK) on May 29, 1976, and soon afterward the first edition of "The Korean Journal of Ecology" (presently the "Journal of Ecology and Field Biology") was issued, in 1977.

In 1960, Prof. Kim traveled to the United States and studied plant ecology with Prof. H. J. Oosting and Prof. W. D. Billings at Duke University; his paper on "Forms of Phosphorus and Forest Types in the Duke Forest" was published on Ecology 43(3): 535-538, 1962. In 1961, Prof. Kim wrote a specialized book entitled "Plant Ecology" in Korea. Therefore, we continue to refer to Prof. Kim as the godfather of Ecology in Korea.

Prof. Kim received his doctoral degree from Tohoku University on October, 1966; his doctoral thesis addressed "The Nutrient Holding Capacity of Soils of Different Forest Types in Korea." As many know, Prof. Kim's main subjects of study were the relationships between various plants and soils.

Prof. Kim served as the 5th presidents of The Botanical Society of Korea (1967-1968) and the 7th President of The Korean Association for Conservation of Nature (1982-1984) including the Ecological Society of Korea (1976-1980).

Since the introduction of the Biological Science Curriculum Study (BSCS) from the USA to Korea in 1965, Prof. Kim served as the chairman of the BSCS Translation Committee, and the Green version among three versions (Blue version, Yellow version and Green version) was translated into Korean in 1972. Prof. Kim also made great contributions to the field of biology education.

Beside "Plant Ecology" (1961) as discussed above, Prof. Kim wrote many books, including "Plant Ecology"

in 1970, "Ecology of Plants of Korea" in 1973, "Collected Short Stories of Ha-Dam" (*Ha* means summer, *Dam* means pond and *Ha Dam* is Prof. Kim's pen name) in 1975, "39 Scientific Shocks" in 1995, "What are Scientists Studying Now?" in 1997, "Naturalized Plants of Korea" in 2000, "Science in Wild Plants" in 2006, and others.

In addition, books translated by Prof. Kim are as follows: "Introduction to Plant Ecology" in 1971, "Climate and Evolution" in 1987, "World Observed from Living Organisms" in 1988 and "Boden und Kultur" (Soil and Culture) in 1989. He became a member of the National Academy of Sciences of Korea in 1986.

During the days after his retirement, Prof. Kim received the 'Writing Prize' from the National Academy of Sciences of Korea in 1981, the 'Cultural Prize' from the Seonggok Cultural Foundation in 1993, and the 'Scientific Culture Prize' from the Korea Foundation of Science and Culture (presently the Korea Foundation for the Advancement of Science and Creativity) in 2007. Among all recipients of Cultural Foundation of Science awards, Prof. Kim is the oldest person ever awarded a prize.

Prof. Kim was always dreaming and thinking about the further development of The Ecological Society of Korea, and also constantly thought about ways to advance ecological research in Korea to the highest world standards during his life. I sincerely hope that younger ecologists exert their best efforts, in accordance with the wishes of the late Prof. Choon-Min Kim.

I wish to offer my sincerest condolences to Mrs. Jeong-Sil Lee, Prof. Kim's son, Mr. Eun-Yong Kim, and his family.

And to Prof. Kim, you will always occupy a special place in my heart, and I will never forget your sincere and gentle-mannered advice and counsel.

May your soul rest in peace and may your memory continue to bless those you have touched throughout your long and productive life.

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