



Review of “English-Language Journals in Korean Studies: *Their Significance and Challenges*”

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In commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the *Korea Journal*, this paper, “English-Language Journals in Korean Studies: Their Significance and Challenges,” reviews English-language journals in Korean Studies published in Korea and presents future directions for development. As the author outlines in the Introduction, journals published in Korea have undergone enormous changes over the past 60 years and English-language journals, including the *Korea Journal*, are no exception. Particularly, the fast-growing demand for *internationalization* since 2000 has made the internationalization of the Korean academy a matter of course in the context of the growing trans-border mobility of human and physical resources, real-time overseas connections via the Internet and the SNS, and active cross-border exchange of scholars and researchers. Entering the 21st century, the ecological environment of Korean Studies of the 20th century, when knowledge produced in Korea was circulated and consumed domestically, is being strongly challenged to enhance international exchange and inter-country academic dialogue.

At this juncture, the paper shows a pertinent awareness of the problem, and the challenges and their resolutions it discusses deserve an attentive ear. A critical consciousness of the issue of how English-language journals in Korean Studies published in Korea can evolve to be more productive and beneficial penetrates the entire paper as its core theme, which is, indeed, an issue facing everyone who contemplates the internationalization of the

Korean academy. Also, concisely explaining the emergence of the need to use English in Korea that predated the publication of English-language journals (the transitional period to modernity), allows us to understand the historical necessity behind the creation of English-language periodicals in the country.

Section 3, which discusses *Pictorial Korea* (published from 1950), *Korea Journal* (from 1961), and *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* (from 1988), provides a nice overview of the major stream of English-language journals in Korea. Yet, focusing too much on the “publication and aims of the journals,” the paper does not pay enough attention to content-wise changes and research trends. Nevertheless, it nails the gist of their transformation by precisely capturing the shift from magazines to journals and the progression from the phase of one-way journalistic publicity to that of two-way academic exchange.

The paper’s most important message may be found in Section 4, which offers prospects for the role of English-language journals in Korean Studies in promoting academic development in Korea. According to the author’s assessment, English-language journals ushered in the era of publishing original research in the 1990s, breaking from the previous approach of delivering only notable research outcomes produced in Korea translated into English for a foreign audience. As a result, Hwang also observes, papers dealing with special topics were churned out through collaboration with Western academic circles, and the share of papers by Korean researchers increased. Apart from exterior growth, Hwang pays a great deal of attention to the adversity and crisis confronting both Korean Studies in foreign countries and Korean Studies in Korea. The former, which is estranged from the mainstream academy due to the lack of interest on the part of foreign scholars, is on the verge of slipping into a “Korean Studies ghetto,” while the latter is losing its capacity for integrative thinking, trapped in the rigidity of the disciplinary system and the harmful effects of quantitative evaluations. These realities notwithstanding, the author’s outlook is positive that the crisis can be overcome by learning from each other’s strengths via mutual collaboration.

Hwang concludes by suggesting that English-language journals

in Korean Studies operate as a platform for discourses that foster the integration of disciplines, as an arena where overseas academic communities (with a relatively broad scope of interest for research beyond disciplines) can meet their Korean counterparts (who are intent on producing in-depth knowledge within specific areas) and engage in a lively and stimulating scholarly exchange.

Reading the paper multiple times, I was able to deepen my understanding of the past, present, and future of English-language journals in Korean Studies. It is an informative piece of work with a well-organized structure, succinct explanations, and thoughtful verifications of the proposed arguments and which does not lose sight of the core issue. On the other hand, however, going through it carefully, I have found things I would like to know more about, and would like to invite the author for further elaboration and discussion. Expressing appreciation for the valuable contribution and minding my duty as a discussant, let me offer some comments.

There are two things that I want to inquire about and suggest the author elaborate on in his paper. First, I think it would be good to add an analysis of research trends in English-language journals in Korean Studies, or at least a short research history of the *Korea Journal*, which offered the very momentum to write the essay. The author briefly mentions papers presented at a forum held in celebration of the journal's 50th anniversary and five papers published in the Autumn 2011 issue, but does not touch upon academic trends in Korean Studies. Of the five aforementioned papers, Hwang only refers occasionally to Park Myoung-Kyu's presentation, "Internationalization of Korean Studies Examined through an Analysis of the Korea Journal." This vacuum may leave the reader curious about major research trends. In his paper, Hwang presents an adequate analysis of the changes in the milieu of the journals and the goals during the initial phase of their publication. Nevertheless, an overview of the main features of research history, even in the form of summarizing what was achieved in 2011, would benefit readers.

Second, an attentive reader cannot overlook the statement, "There are many papers that tackle new topics and issues based on interactions with overseas communities of Korean Studies." In order to identify challenges and

desirable directions for English-language journals in Korean Studies, this question should be dealt with: If there are any successful exemplars, what are they? Or if there are to be such exemplars, what should they be? The discussion in Section 4, as it stands now, seems to dwell too much on the crisis of Korean Studies in Korea and beyond to note the field's achievements or to offer a kernel of potentially effective alternatives.

Now let me discuss a few things I have come to ponder while reading the paper. The first concerns how to achieve that *platform or arena of discussion* where Korean and foreign scholars of Korean Studies might interact. As the author is aware, the Korean and overseas academic ecosystems are quite different. Foreign scholars of Korean Studies face a tougher environment for academic survival than their Korean counterparts. As a visiting scholar in 2015 at the University of California, Berkeley, I witnessed the need for research on Korean classical literature in the United States. Experiencing the research conditions of this particular field during my stay at Berkeley, I felt acutely the ghettoization of Korean Studies. Topics that garnered any interest in Korean Studies from American scholars were sociological ones, such as colonialization, North Korea's nuclear capabilities, gender, etc., and in terms of temporal period, the era after the foundation of the Republic of Korea (1948). In this climate, the academic allure of Korean literature spanning over five millennia up to colonialization was next to none. I remember how misery and despair enwrapped me.

Then I came across a paper by Park Sunyoung, associate professor in the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures at University of Southern California, entitled "A Review of the Current Status of Overseas Research on Korean Literature." I agreed with her argument that Korean Studies in foreign countries and Korean Studies in Korea would have to build their own distinct archives and ultimately take their own paths. Korean Studies in the United States needs to compete and coexist with humanities within the American system. That is to say, it should cater to academic consumers in that country, be they universities or the general public. It is difficult to expect in-depth studies on Korean classical literary works where there are few scholars who can even read them. In this situation, it is fully understandable that American researchers of Korean literature switch

their research subjects to those that are enticing to their audience, e.g., photography, film, performance, and the Korean Wave. They have research topics and approaches that are most suitable to them. It is more sensible to pick up what they can do well and do it better, and it is more efficient to deliver the outcomes of well-conducted studies to the American audience and other researchers and obtain their evaluation.

The author is certainly aware that domestic and overseas researchers in Korean Studies display great differences in the materials and methodologies they use and the perspectives they employ in approaching their research. These differences are, in reality, less likely to draw them together for collaboration than to keep them apart. Nonetheless, out of a sincere hope of overcoming such practical difficulties, the author proposes that English-language journals function as platforms for promoting interaction and fostering academic stimulations. Putting it squarely, however, will it be possible to make this a reality? If it is to be realized even partially, what should be done in a practical sense?

While each journal will have to choose their own optimal strategies based on their given conditions, let us mull over the cases of the *Korea Journal* and *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* for a moment. What audience might they serve and offer a space for discussion? The author supposes an idealistic model wherein Korean and foreign researchers, as presenters and readers at the same time, engage in a two-way academic discourse. However, with a sober assessment of the reality, the room for common ground and collaboration is much too small. Practically speaking, international researchers of Korean Studies will find US journals more familiar, e.g., the *Journal of Asian Studies* (Association for Asian Studies), *Korean Studies* (University of Hawaii), and the *Journal of Korean Studies* (University of Washington). In these circumstances, if the *Korea Journal* and *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies*—where Korean scholars are playing a leading role—are to function as a space for discussion and communication, they will inevitably have to choose certain academic areas and subjects for productive exchange. This requires purposeful planning and deliberate coordination by some party, because such space is hardly expected to be generated naturally. This points to the need to analyze the “papers that tackle new topics and

problems based on interactions with overseas communities of Korean Studies” in order to have a progressive outlook.

Next, I would like to reconsider the question of whether one-way publicity journalism serves no use. The approach of transmitting international achievements in Korean Studies to a Korean audience, or that of transmitting achievements in domestic Korean Studies to an international audience, is unidirectional in nature. Even when papers of both sides appear in the same journal providing an arena of exchange, the unilaterality of publicity is still there. But is such publicity really a defect? Converting the contents into English introduces artificial elements in the process of rewriting and translating for foreign readers, but I think it also has benefits and deserves positive consideration. International universities and high-level readers still need reliable and systematic information regarding Korean culture, language, classics, and subjects of particular interest. In today’s world, state-of-the-art media such as YouTube are available in real time, but applying such technology to journals may seem too fancy. Sometimes, publication in book form is looked upon as a more effective medium.

Despite all this, in recognition of international demand, a channel for transmitting high-level journalistic content still seems necessary. Such materials can be more helpful from the standpoint of overseas university faculty. Today, K-pop and K-culture attract the unprecedented interest and affection of people globally. It will not harm academic advancement to use journals, as well as images, magazines, and books, for delivering academic outcomes produced in Korea. Perhaps, if this opportune momentum is taken advantage of to share them in a mode tailored to the conditions of the receiving end, it will likely further replenish the international base of Korean Studies.

REFERENCE

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