



Special Feature

Korean Cultural Heritage Outside Korea:
How They are Perceived
and How They are Treated

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In the past few years, the *Review of Korean Studies* (hereafter, *RKS*) hosted several Special sections to provide the readers with an overview of Korean cultural artifacts in custody of foreign museums and art museums. First, in the June 2023 issue, we published 4 reviews on the Korean collections in U.S.-based Museums of Art, and then one year later for the June 2024 issue, we hosted 5 reviews of Japan-based museums where cultural artifacts of Korea were in custody. It was more than a meaningful experience to do so, as we were able to invite experts who have been working in those institutes or have been affiliated with the collections in a variety of capacities.

After hosting these series of invaluable reviews, it only became clear that another type of effort would have to accompany such endeavors, to go beyond learning the existence of such valuable Korean cultural assets abroad or understanding their value, and begin discussion of how the Korean cultural legacy has been viewed, perceived, and treated by the population and authorities of countries they are in now, as well as how they established such a cultural presence in an extremely foreign environment.

So, we decided to launch a project that would culminate in a Special Studies section under the title of “Korean Cultural Heritage Outside Korea: How They are Perceived and How They are Treated.” And we were able to invite and publish three contributions from experts in the field.

Kim Soojin of Sungkyunkwan University provided us with a contribution entitled “From Colonial Dilettantism to the Korean Wave: The Formation and Ever-changing Roles of Korean Art Collections in the United States.” In this paper, which classifies key players and collection of Korean art in the U.S. into total of 4 phases and analyze their respective characteristics, Kim discusses the history of the Korean Art collections in the United States and how they were formed through various avenues such as official collection by various entities

including Japanese antique dealers, U.S. Military personnel, and professional collectors. Included in the discussion are also serious issues such as provenance, repatriation, and utilization of Korean art collections, as well as nationality debates or its presentation as ethnography, which all highlight the unique nature of U.S.-based Korean art collections: how they were affected by the Korea-U.S. relations and what their broader significance is in historical context. Possible solutions for certain issues and potential future utilizations of the Korean art collections in the U.S. are also discussed.

Elmer Veldkamp from Leiden University provided us with an article entitled “The Multivalence of Collected Korean Objects in the Netherlands: National Collections, International Networks, and Second-hand Collection Practices.” With an intention to embrace the sheer complexity manifested by European museum collections of Korean artifacts, the author aims to construct a perspective to properly discuss the future of these collections. In discussing the historical and ethnographic Korean collections in Leiden, Veldkamp discusses diverse yet all important facets we can spot from the history of European collections, as well as various objects, people, and networks intertwined with that history, which only highlights the “webs of significance” (surrounding such collections) as the author puts it. Commenting on certain problems displayed by prior views, the author suggests taking a broad, data-centered approach toward Korean Collections in Europe, so that we could develop a point of view which would help us understand the “complexity and messiness” of international, inter-collection networks and exchanges.

Ji Young Park of the Denver Art Museum contributed an article named “A Museological Exploration of *One Hundred Boys at Play* beyond Korea.” Considering the act of exhibiting a painting as an observable socio-cultural phenomenon, the author examines the architecture, collection arrangements, and selection of objects in the Korean gallery of the Denver Art Museum, of which one of its vital missions is to exhibit fine Korean artwork. Opening with a sampling of a particular Korean folding screen, the author discusses individual objects while presenting the significance—not only in terms of value but historical meaning as well—and also shares with us the challenges that involved preparing the exhibition of the *One Hundred Boys at Play*, within the context of Korean painting in an encyclopedic museum. Emphasized by Park is the need to neither over-contextualize nor diminish an object’s cultural importance. According to the author, it would be a challenge to present Korean artworks (or

any country's art for that matter) with "acknowledging their layered meanings without oversimplifying, exoticizing, or assimilating them for a foreign audience."

We at the *RKS* are so proud to feature all three contributions through this Special Studies section and again convey our deepest gratitude to the authors who kindly agreed to share their wonderful insight on the historical and cultural significance of Korean cultural legacy and collections located outside the Korean peninsula. Their observations and evaluations will certainly help raise the level of awareness throughout the globe of Korean cultural legacy everywhere on Earth, and the *RKS* too will continue hosting important studies on this subject in the future.