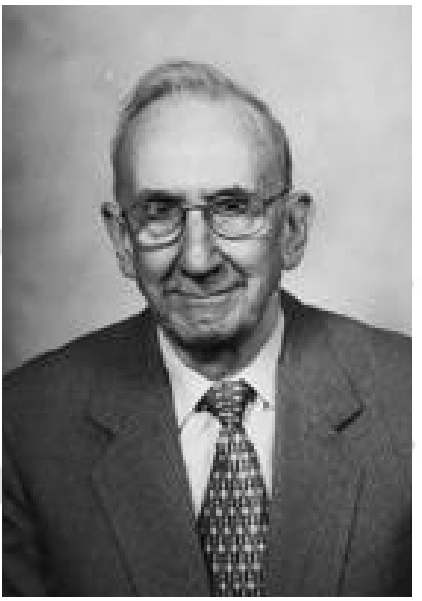
AN INTERVIEW WITH

GARI LEDYARD



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The *Review of Korean Studies*, in cooperation with *Chŏngshin munhwa yŏn ġu (Korean Studies Quarterly)* features interviews with eminent Korean studies scholars worldwide. In this fifth interview, we introduce Prof. Gari Ledyard, King Sejong Professor of Korean Studies Emeritus, Columbia University in the City of New York, USA. The interview was conducted by Prof. Charles Armstrong, Associate Professor and Director of the Center for Korean Research, Columbia University.

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An Interview with GARI LEDYARD

How Korea came into my life - more by Fate than by Design

Question: Professor Ledyard, by the time this interview appears in print, you will have been associated with Korea and Korean studies for exactly half a century, so there is a great deal for us to talk about. But first, could you say something about your life before you decided to devote yourself to Korean studies?

Answer: I was born in Syracuse, New York, in 1932, in the depths of the Depression. Times were hard, and my family lived in various places as my father struggled to find work. He just happened to be working in Syracuse when I was born. We were a Michigan family, and most of my childhood was spent in Detroit and Ann Arbor, Michigan. In 1948, my family moved to California, where two years later I graduated from high school in San Rafael, just north of San Francisco. I studied for two years at the University of Michigan and at San Francisco State College, but did not do well. I had started out hoping to be an electrical engineer but quickly found that it did not suit me. I then attempted majors in business administration and economics, but they proved even less attractive. My favorite interests were languages and classical music, especially opera. But although I had some early training in music, I had little natural talent for it. And I had no idea of how I could make a living at languages. By early 1953, I had accumulated only an average academic record. I was not pleased with myself, and I was worried over my future course. So in February of that year, I decided to join the army, and that's how Korea came into my life.

Question: How did that come about?

Answer: Well, it was more by fate than by design. The Korean War began just nine days after my graduation from high school. I had heard about Korea once or twice before then, but it had not made much of an

impression on me. I remember once trying to find it on a map. I knew it was somewhere near China and Japan, but I couldn't find it. The reason was that in so far as Korea was concerned, American maps in those days had still not escaped Japan's influence, and to find Korea one had to look for "Chōsen." Of course, once the war was under way, there was a map in the newspaper almost every day, and everybody learned where "Korea" was. The war focused me quite strongly on Korea, for the simple reason that after my 18th birthday in April, 1950, I was required by law to register for the military draft. To be honest, I was afraid of the draft and of the possibility that I might have to fight in the war. Fortunately, young men enrolled in a college or university could have their draft deferred until after they received their degree. But unfortunately, by early 1953, my academic record was not impressive. Moreover, I had changed my major several times, which accurately reflected my lack of academic resolve. Draft boards paid attention to such things, and I was vulnerable. If I were drafted, I wouldn't have much choice of service specialty and could be on the battlefield within months. But if I enlisted in the army voluntarily, I could list two or three military specialties that I was interested in, and with luck I might get some useful training and maybe even an interesting assignment. For this privilege I would have to serve for three years rather than the two years required of a draftee.

Question: So what specialties did you apply for?

Answer: I can't remember all of the items that I checked on the recruiter's list. But one of them was language training, with the idea of becoming an interpreter or translator. The recruiter of course could not promise anything, but he assured me that when I completed my basic training, I would be given the opportunity to take examinations to test my aptitude for the specialties that I had selected. And this is the place where fate decided what would happen to me. I was inducted into the army in a large group of people like myself, who had volunteered in hope of a special assignment. But during my two months of basic training, I became seriously ill and was hospitalized for nearly two weeks. When I returned to my unit, I had missed too much training and found I would have to start all over again in a new training

cycle. When I completed basic training, I reported to another military post where my assignment would be determined. There I found out that all of the people I had originally started with, who had arrived for assignment a month before me, had been given only two options for specialty — they could either be cooks or military policemen! All other specialty quotas had been filled. For them, it didn't make a bit of difference what they had applied for. Such is the army! However, by the time I arrived, many quotas had been opened up again. I applied for the language aptitude examination and passed it. Within a few days I found that I had been assigned to study Russian, and would report to the Army Language School (nowadays known as the Defense Language Institute) in Monterey, California, as soon as the next Russian class started, which would be in about seven weeks. Until then I would do various temporary duties at the assignment center. Had it not been for my illness and the delay in completing basic training, my fate would have been to spend the next three years as a cook or an MP! God only knows where I would be now.

Question: So how did you connect with Korea?

Answer: Well, the army can always change its mind. I was really happy with the idea of learning Russian. I loved Russian music and novels, and when I was a student I had taken singing lessons with a Russian voice teacher, who had greatly inspired me. I looked forward to learning the language. But a week or so after getting my assignment, those of us who had been assigned to study Russian and other Slavic languages were suddenly called to headquarters and informed that we were all being transferred to a class in Korean, and that our class would start in Monterey within a few days. Fate had struck again. I had expected that after a year studying in Monterey I would be assigned to some duty in Europe. Now it was to be Korea for me.

Question: How did you feel about that?

Answer: To be honest, my immediate reaction was disappointment, and it took a little time for me to get over the loss of the opportunity to study Russian. The war in Korea was still raging, and I worried about

that too. However it happened, forces over which I had no control dictated that I study Korean.

Question: Interesting. What was the program in Korean at the Army Language School like?

Answer: It lasted a full year — fifty weeks of training, with two weeks ' leave at the end. There were six hours of class a day, five days a week, and we were trained intensively in speaking, reading, and writing. The teachers were all Koreans, men and women, most of whom had been students in the United States. The sections had eight or nine people each, an ideal size for language learning, with lots of one-on-one instructional situations. I immediately developed a great liking for Korean. I had earlier studied Latin, Spanish, and German, and had taught myself a lot of Italian by reading opera librettos. Korean was of course a very different kind of language, but I found it very interesting, and I worked hard at it. I was especially fascinated by the Chinese characters, which began to be introduced quite early in the course. Our texts were mainly in Hangŭl of course, but we were expected to know the Chinese characters, and many of our materials were in mixed script. The teachers were very nice people, and I have fond memories of all of them. In many cases I later met with their families in Korea. After a year at Monterey, I really wanted to get to Korea as soon as possible.

Question: When did you arrive in Korea?

Answer: Our class graduated in May, 1954, but it was November before I got to Korea. The army could be perverse. They sent the lower half of the class to Korea straight away, and there was a hint that in a way the ones who had not done well were being *punished* by being sent to Korea. I finished fourth in a class of about 25 people, and was in the other group, which was sent to Washington for assignment. I was keenly disappointed. It took at least a month for the authorities to decide what to do with us, and in that time I lobbied intensively to be sent to Korea. The older and more experienced soldiers, many of whom had served some very rough time there, were quite surprised

that anybody should *want* to go to Korea. But I heard from someone that there were vacancies in Japan for people with my training. I right away applied for assignment there, and very soon I found myself in Seattle, waiting for the next troopship to sail. I arrived in Tokyo late in July, 1955, and worked there for about four months. While it was not what I really wanted, I did welcome the opportunity to see Japan, and I immediately set about studying Japanese. But finally I heard of vacancies in Korea, and applied for transfer, and soon I had my orders and was on the plane. I arrived in Korea on November 20, 1954. If I had not been pro-active and constantly pushed to be sent to Korea, I might never have got there! Korean friends have often asked me why I "chose" to study to Korea, and since I hadn't chosen it, I often answered that maybe fate had chosen Korea *for* me. However it happened, it proved to be decisive for my life. I can honestly say that I was blessed by fate, because I have had a wonderful career in Korean studies and I have been very happy in it.

Experiencing Seoul

Question: Where were you stationed in Korea?

Answer: I had the good fortune to spend all my military time in Korea in Seoul. My unit occupied a building that had once been a middle school, so that although my immediate surroundings were strictly military, my general ambience was an average neighborhood in Seoul. Whenever I would consider the much less pleasant places that I might have had to work in, I was very grateful indeed. It was within easy walking distance of the downtown area, and I quickly became familiar with the city.

Question: What was Seoul like at that time?

Answer: I arrived in Korea about 16 months after the truce had been signed. Although Seoul had been cleaned up in a general way, there were still many signs of the destruction that it had suffered during the war. The main administration building — the Chung-

angch'ŏng, which was torn down by Kim Youngsam during the 90s — was still standing but was heavily damaged, with only a small part fit for use. Across the street, where the Chonghap Ch'ŏngsa now stands, there was a city of tents, many of them used for temporary schools. A whole block in Myŏngdong was in ruins, and here and there throughout the city you could still see buildings that were only partly standing. Numerous destroyed buildings had already been cleared and replaced with other structures, many of them temporary and built with salvaged materials. It would be well into the 1970s before the tall buildings started to rise and the city began to take the shape that one sees now. By today's standards Seoul was sometimes much more convenient then. If you wanted to cross the street, you just crossed! No tunnels or overhead bridges. If you wanted a cab, you just stepped into the street and waved your hand. An old car that probably didn't have a single original part left in it would pull up, you would quickly negotiate a fare, and then jump in. More than once the taxi would break down before I got to my destination! But people were of good cheer, everyone was busy doing something, and the general impression was unending activity. There was a kind of democracy of the streets, with everybody, no matter what their station in life, putting up with the various annoyances and discomforts that affected all. It may sound a bit sentimental, but the genuine goodness of human nature seemed then to be much more in evidence than it does in the busy, prosperous, and competitive atmosphere of Seoul today. Koreans who struggled through those times, and who perhaps experienced more tension and ill will than I may have been able to see, might sigh at my innocence and gullibility. And it's true that as a soldier in the U.S. Army, I did *not* have to struggle for my daily existence, and that I could experience the real difficulties of Korean life only vicariously. Still, the more people I met and the more friends I made, and the more I saw of Korea generally, the more I liked it and the happier I was.

Question: You seem to have had an active social life in Seoul. How did you go about meeting people?

Answer: I had received requests from several of my teachers to visit

Standing in front of Dolce tea room with the late Chŏng Yŏg-il (center), a film critic of the *Chosŏn Ilbo* (February 1955)

their familiesrequests from several of my teachers tovisit their families when I arrived in Seoul.

I did look them up, and in some cases I continued to see them afterwards. One of my first acquaintances was Hoon Koo Lee (Yi Hun-gu), one of whose sons had taught me in Monterey. Dr. Lee, as a Ph.D.student at the University of Wisconsin had written, independently of any Japanese review, a very thorough and critical study of the Korean rural economy in the 1930s, and it is still today very important source material for the colonial period.[1] He had served in the military government and I believe also under the early Republic as a Minister of Agriculture. He was one of the first people I visited, and he immediately invited me to come and have a Thanksgiving dinner with him and one of his other sons a few days later. He lived in a small and very odd two-story house that stood near the corner of the Wonnamdong intersection, nestled up against the wall of the zoo, which was then in the gardens of the Ch ̓anggyŏngwon. He was a very busy man then, and we did not see each other too many times, but he was the first academic scholar of Korean studies that I ever met. Besides the relatives of my teachers, I also made many friends in tea rooms. Given my fondness for classical music, I quickly discovered the" Renaissance, "a musical tea room in Insadong (it later moved to Chongno 1-ka), and another one in Myŏngdong called" Dolce. " The Renaissance had better music, and the customers there were serious about listening to it. If you wanted to have good music and also talk, the Dolce had more interesting

1. Hoon K. Lee, *Land Utilization and Rural Economy in Korea*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1936. Reprint, Greenwood Press Publishers, New York, 1969.

people, many of them involved in music, the arts, and various professions. Just down the street from there was the Ch ŏngdong (" Bronze ") tea room, popular with poets and writers. That 's where I met and became friends with O Sang-sun (pen name Kongch 'o), an elderly man and a well-known poet of the day, who always wore a white suit, chain-smoked cigarettes with his amber-colored cigarette holder, and surrounded himself with beautiful young women. He was quite a character. Not too far from the Bronze, near what was then the principal theatre and concert hall in Seoul, the Shi Konggwan, was another tea room called" Figaro. " It was there that I met Yun I-sang, the well known composer, although at that time he was still a struggling musician. He was utterly charming and friendly, and I often visited him and his family in their home. He later went to Europe to study, and became one of the most famous modernists in 20th century European music. He also became a victim of the KCIA, which abducted him and brought him back to Seoul because of his political beliefs favorable to the north. Ultimately he was allowed to return to Germany as the result of the international and diplomatic uproar over the kidnapping.

Question: Was it around this time that you decided you wanted to go into Korean studies?

Answer: Not really. But it was at that time that I formed a bond with Korea and realized that, once I was out of the army, I wanted to have something to do with it. I had still not heard of such a term as " Korean studies, "and even if I had, I really had no concept of an academic life. Yet, as I look back on those days now, I realize that I had been" studying Korea "all along. I was certainly making very good progress in speaking and reading Korean and learning Chinese characters, and was already learning about the famous Chinese poets. Inevitably, I learned a lot about recent Korean history and contemporary life through conversation and some reading that I did in the Eighth Army library. I taught English at the old" American Language Institute, "better known simply as the A.L.I., and I tutored private individuals in English conversation, including some government officials and the senior executives of the *Chosŏn Ilbo*. I wrote articles for the *Korea Times* and the *Han 'guk Ilbo*. In the course of my time in Seoul

I met people from every walk of life and became familiar with their life experiences. But most importantly I learned a lot about myself. It is hard to realize now how sheltered and naive I had been up until that time, how little I understood the bigger world. When I went into the army I was an unsuccessful college kid without a clue about the future. By the time I left Korea I had become a more thoughtful and self-assured young man. It's a very personal thing, really, but it was in Korea that that happened. From that foundation, in what seems now to be a seamless and natural chain of events, I ended up with a life in Korean studies.

Question: When did you leave Korea?

Answer: The usual tour of duty for an enlisted man of my status was 16 months. But I had to leave after only 9 months, and I was very unhappy about it. What happened — and I suppose it was inevitable — is that my socializing with Koreans came to the attention of my commanding officer, and he did not like it. I had gone with some Dolce friends for a little drinking at a nearby *taep'ojip*, and it had continued with dinner at the home of a nearby friend. When I got back to the unit around 11 o'clock, my breath — which signaled very clearly that I had been eating Korean food-was noticed by an officer, and I told him that I had been eating downtown. That was a violation of the regulations, because at that time all the restaurants in Seoul except the ones in the Bando and Chosŏn hotels, and a Chinese restaurant in Sogongdong, were off limits to American military personnel. Worse, as the officer looked me over, he saw chalk smudges on the back of my shirt, and it came to light that I had taught English that afternoon at A.L.I.. That too was a violation of regulations. I was confined to the unit the next day, and the following morning I was ordered to report to the Commanding Officer. He gave me a lecture on the anti-fraternization policy and handed me orders reassigning me to a unit related to ours in Japan. I only had a couple of days to say goodbye, and all of a sudden I was back in Tokyo.

Question: Anti-fraternization?

Answer: That's what they called it. The army tried its best to keep American soldiers off the streets. There was probably some basis for the policy, since a lot of American troops did behave badly, and it may well have saved a lot of trouble both for the army and the Koreans. But there was a double standard. My unit was no different from others in having a little "camp town" street close by, and it was well patronized by soldiers in our unit. It was all right to be drinking and womanizing close by, where the situation could be quieted down quickly in the event of trouble. On special occasions soldiers could even bring their girl friends into our unit as long as they stayed in the bar, where there was a band and dancing. But teaching English? Eating at a restaurant downtown? That was "fraternization." Beyond that, in the military culture generally, Korea and Koreans were not popular. Korean restaurants were assumed to have food that could make one sick. My activities were seen by many who knew about them as strange and suspicious. All of this is a very unpleasant business, and unfortunately there is much in the present American military culture in Korea that is still the same as it was fifty years ago. Leaving Korea was very hard. Of course, I have been back there many times since. But as much as I have enjoyed all of my trips to Korea over the last fifty years, I have never been as happy in the streets of Seoul as I was as a 22-year-old G.I. Or, apart from some wonderful family times and personal moments that came later, as happy generally.

Graduate Studies in Berkeley

Question: When did you begin your formal studies in Berkeley?

Answer: That was in the Spring semester of 1956. I arrived in Tokyo in early September, 1955, and would be returning to the States sometime in December. I spent my remaining free time studying Japanese and trying to continue the same kind of tea room life that I had enjoyed so much in Korea. I did meet some very nice people and had some interesting experiences, but I never quite found the openness, the warmth, or the spontaneity that had made Korea so special. I spent time in the big army library in Tokyo looking for books on Korea,

Graduate student days at Berkeley

and was quite surprised to find how few there were, and how poor in quality they were compared with books in English on China or Japan, of which I also read quite a few at that time. The best one I came across was *The Koreans and their Culture*, by an anthropologist, Cornelius Osgood (Ronald Press, New York, 1951). I especially liked the chapters on his study of a village on Kanghwa Island, and the understanding and empathy that he had for its life and people. Looked at today, his account of Korean history is extremely poor, but given the quality of the literature in English on Korea that was available in 1950, one realizes that it would have been hard to do any better. In any case, my reading showed me that Korea had not been very well studied in the West. It was then, in Tokyo, that I grasped not only how much more there was to learn, but the idea of a useful career studying Korea. I wrote to the University of California, at Berkeley, and was admitted for the Spring semester of 1956. They apparently overlooked my poor transcript and favored my status as an army veteran. They even granted 30 units of credit — a whole year! — for my Army Language School training.

Question: So then you began your graduate work?

Answer: I still had to complete my undergraduate degree. I was admitted to the Junior Class, that is, the third year. The bigger issue was, if I was going to study Korea, how was I to proceed? I had applied to Berkeley mainly because it was close to my home and as a California resident the tuition and fees would be cheaper than elsewhere. In early 1956, there was still no formally established program of Korean studies anywhere in the United States. I had learned enough in Seoul to know that to study Korean culture, at the very least you had to know both Korean and classical Chinese. I already had considerable experience in

speaking and reading Korean, so my plan was to start in Chinese and go on from there. Although I did not know it when I applied, in so far as the U.S. was concerned, Berkeley just happened to be one of the best places, if *not* the *best* place, to study Chinese. In the end, all of my degrees —B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. —were in Chinese language and literature. My professors knew of my interest in Korea and encouraged me to emphasize Korean topics and issues in my research. Given the quality of the program and the total flexibility given me during my seven years in Berkeley, I ended up getting the best possible training to study traditional Korea and its culture.

Question: Who were the principal professors that you worked with?

Answer: The most famous ones were Peter Alexis Boodberg, a czarist Russian exile and an absolutely unique scholar and human being; Y. R. Chao (Chao Yuanren), a famous linguist and pioneer in developing the field of Chinese linguistics; Edward Schafer, who had been a student of Boodberg; and Chen Shih-hsiang, then well known in the field of literature both as an academic and critic. All of these men taught me many things, but Boodberg was a unique inspiration. It was from him that I learned what a scholar was. Finally, there was Michael Rogers, then still a young academic, who had an enormous influence on me, both as a teacher and as the kind of scholar I could be if I worked hard. Unlike the others, he had also studied Korean. He had already begun to produce his long series of articles on the historical relations between China and Korea, using both Chinese and Korean source materials. This is a wonderful body of work, unfortunately scattered in many journals, and still largely unknown and unappreciated in Korea.

Question: Now you wrote your Ph.D. dissertation, *The Korean Language Reform of 1446*, on the invention of the Korean alphabet. What was the origin of that project?

Answer: Even before I had completed my B.A., I had already decided that my Ph.D. dissertation would be on the making of the Korean alphabet. It 's one of the greatest stories that Korea has to tell. In

Seoul I had already bought a facsimile reprint of *Hunmin Chŏng ŭm Haerye*, which had been published in 1446 when the alphabet was first proclaimed. The *Hunmin Chŏng ŭm* proper, written by King Sejong himself had been known from the beginning. But the Haerye itself had disappeared at an early date, and except for its preface, which was known from other sources, its contents were unknown. But around 1940, a woodblock-printed copy of it was discovered. I had always wanted to be the one who translated this marvelous text into English. My desire grew all the stronger at Berkeley when I studied historical Chinese linguistics with Y.R. Chao and realized that Sejong himself had studied pretty much the same materials that I had, and that these were central to the theoretical foundations of the Korean alphabet. Under Professor Chao's guidance I made a provisional translation with some annotations, and this became my senior thesis, in 1958. I wanted to expand this into a complete study for my M.A. thesis, but I postponed that plan when I realized that the topic was simply too big for an M.A. thesis, and that there were many essential materials and sources which were not then available in Berkeley. Instead, I produced for the M.A. thesis a study of the Chinese and Korean diplomatic documents related to early Koryŏ-Mongol relations for the M.A. thesis. That was especially good for me because it got me into the realm of true historical studies, and in that and related projects I gained a good grounding in the kind of textual analysis that is necessary for studying history. My first two significant publications, a study of two Mongolian documents in the *Koryŏsa*, and another on the significance of Koryŏ -Mongol relations for dating *The Secret History of the Mongols*, were developed from the M.A. work. Those two articles were published in 1963 and 1964.

In 1963, I received a Ford Foundation fellowship for my Ph.D. research on the alphabet. It was wonderful being back in Seoul again. It was a wonderful year. My wife at that time, Evelyn, and our daughter Kathleen, then only 11/2, were with me. We lived with a Korean family in a wonderful, large *han ŏk* in Hyehwadong. This time, with a family and serious work to do, there was no more sitting around in tearooms. But of course I had an enjoyable reunion with all my earlier friends, and I later ran into them from time to time, but they too were now busy with their own lives. I registered as a research student in the

department of Korean Language and Literature at Seoul National University, which had not yet moved to its present location in Kangnam[2] and was just a short walk away from where we lived. The late Marshall Pihl, who would become a much admired professor of Korean Literature at Hawaii but was then a Harvard graduate student, was also studying in Seoul at that time. Together we had the privilege of reading Middle Korean texts together at S.N.U. under the tutelage of Professor Yi Sung-nyŏng. We would meet with him twice a week and read from the *Sŏkpo sangŏl* and other well known texts from the time of Kings Sejong and Sejo. It was a great experience for both of us, and I know that Marshall remembered it just as fondly as I did. I also met Lee Ki-Moon (Yi Ki-mun), who had just received his first professorial appointment at S.N.U. Although I did not take any formal instruction with him, he took an interest in my work and helped me very much. During that year in Seoul, I gathered many research materials for my thesis and many other books of a more general kind. I spent a lot of time in the book stores in Insadong and in the Tongdaemun market area, and was able to purchase at very reasonable prices many items that are hard to find today at any price. They now constitute the core of a personal Korean studies library that has grown over the years and has served me very well. At that time, American graduate students generally had a period of two years abroad for their Ph.D. research, but I stayed only for one year. The needs of my family were an important factor in going back home, but the most compelling reason was that I had to take up my new position at Columbia University. By the time I left Seoul in August, 1964, I had accomplished most of the preparation for the writing of my dissertation, but given the necessity to get ready for teaching and a growing family — my second daughter was born in 1965 — it still took nearly a year and a half to complete the task.

Question: The title for your dissertation was *The Korean Language Reform of 1446*. King Sejong's alphabet project isn't usually called a "language reform." How did you frame that question?

Answer: Scholars had usually talked of Sejong's project in terms of

2. Kangnam, here means simply the southern area of the Han River. (Editor)

the "creation" (*chʻangje*) of an alphabet. It was that, of course. But what impressed me as my research proceeded was how controversial this project was in Sejong's court. The whole process was intensely political. When the king of a country does something that is intended to affect the life of everyone in the country, it cannot *not* be political. It is well known that most of the bureaucracy opposed the project and belittled the new script as a "barbarian" thing of no value, and criticized the king for wasting his time. Moreover, Sejong had directed that the task of preparing materials for the official announcement of the alphabet take place in an institution called the Hall of Deliberations (*ŭisach'ŏng*), which itself had been established, amidst a great controversy that lasted for years, as an office in which the Crown Prince would preside over some limited aspects of government affairs, which the bureaucracy tenaciously opposed. Finally, the bureaucracy had elitist fears that the alphabet was a long-run threat to their class privileges, fearing that people not well educated in Chinese and Confucianism would become eligible for office. Sejong's clear hopes of literacy in Korean for average people, "even women of all ages," were seen as a class threat. In this context, Sejong's activities surely have to be seen as an over-arching language reform that would change Korea forever. The fact that the bureaucracy and the *sadaebu* governing class successfully stalled the full implementation of that reform for centuries cannot erase the king's original intent. Thus, I saw my task as not merely explaining the alphabet in graphic and linguistic terms, but also in political terms. That meant I had to go exhaustively into the question of why elite Korean culture up until the 15th century had so favored Chinese for written public discourse. It meant going into issues involving idu and other Chinese-character-based methods that reflected the Korean vernacular. It required that Sejong's total reign be surveyed so that his pre-alphabetic policies involving vernacular culture could be understood; it required that his general intellectual activity and institutional innovations be presented so that the overall context of the invention of the alphabet could be clearly grasped. That's what I aimed for. But in addition I also went deeply into the technical linguistic and phonological details involved in the invention of the script.

Question: Your book, which was published only in 1998, in Korea,

has been called a very important work by many scholars in Asian studies. Why did it take so long to publish?

Answer: It's a little embarrassing. I foolishly failed to copyright the dissertation when it was presented for defense at Berkeley in 1966. There were some changes and corrections that I wanted to make, but in my first year or two at Columbia I didn't find the time to give it the thorough review that I thought it needed. In the meantime, a company called University Microfilms, as part of its agreement with the University of California, had already started producing and distributing photo copies of my dissertation. When I finally took it to a university press, I was told that since it had already been distributed without a copyright, substantial rewriting and rearranging would be necessary before it could be copyrighted as a new text. Without such changes I could not get it published. I was very depressed at this news. I liked it just as it was, and the prospect of having to rewrite it was so disagreeable that I couldn't bring myself to do it. I planned to do it eventually but in the meantime I got involved with other projects and it just didn't happen. Professor Lee Ki-Moon used to prod me to get it published, and I will never forget his encouragement and his kind words for my work, of which I had sent him a draft copy. During the mid-1990s, he became the first director of the newly established National Academy of the Korean Language (Kungnip Kug'ŏ yŏn'guwon), and promoted the inclusion of my dissertation in the Institute's publication plans. His successor, Lee Iksop (Yi Ik-sŏp) carried this project out, and in the fall of 1997, I started to make revisions in the text. Unfortunately funds for the project had to be expended by a certain deadline, which I could not meet, with the result that only half of my chapters were properly revised. But I was very happy to see the book properly printed at last. On the other hand, my dissertation was fairly widely known in the version sold by University Microfilms, and many people in North America, Europe, and Russia had cited it in their own work, so it is fair to say that it was well known in the Korean Studies field even before the 1998 publication.

Expanding into Other Areas of Korean Studies

Question: Now you've covered many broad areas of Korean history and culture. Is there any particular area or period that you have a special interest in?

Answer: No, I have never had any special focus, either as to issues or period. I've always said that I was interested in Korean history "from the ice age to the cold war," and you might say that since Korea is the only place (except for Cuba) where the situation created by the cold war hasn't yet been resolved, that still holds. Up until the time you came to Columbia during the 90s, except for several years in the late 60s and early 70s when Frank Baldwin was an assistant professor in Modern Korean history, I was pretty much the only full-time specialist in Korea of any kind. In such a situation I defined my own responsibility as being a generalist. I found myself getting interested in areas of Korean history that my students had asked me about. I was often asked by the chairs of other departments such as sociology or economics to serve on examination or defense committees in cases where there was a Korean dimension in a student's work, and I welcomed those invitations as opportunities to learn more about Korea for myself. Finally, I came to see Korea in a very broad East Asian context that led me into issues that also related to Chinese and Japanese history, and I have published in both of those areas. So gradually my interests spread far beyond King Sejong's period, and as a result my publications have been rather diverse. Thus, in the last two papers that I have written, I deal with an aspect of the conflict between the Korean government and the Catholic church in the early 19th century, and have looked into the possible cultural connections between the Korean region and the so-called "Eastern Barbarians" (Tong'i) reported in ancient Chinese records of the 10th century B.C.E. — nearly a 3,000 year interval! I guess it's fair to say of me that I have greater breadth than depth. The downside of my approach is that I have so far written only two books and much of my work is widely scattered in various journals and in collections of articles edited by others. That has made it difficult for others in the Korean field, especially in Korea, to find and read my work and to get a good idea of what I have done.

A group photo taken at Korea University conference titled" Tradition and Change in Korea. "Gari Ledyard (middle of back row) with Ko Pyŏng-ik, Yi Chŏng-shik, Michael Rogers, Yi Kwang-rin, Yi Ki-baek, and James Palais, among others.

Question: I 'd like to ask you about your first book, *The Dutch Come to Korea*. What got you into that subject?

Answer: I had read a book by Yi Pyŏng-do on Hendrik Hamel,[3] a Dutch sailor who had been ship wrecked in Korea in 1654. I had read Hamel's own account of his adventures in Korea (published in Holland in 1668) long before, but Prof. Yi 's book

introduced a variety of very interesting Korean materials concerning him. I translated those materials into English and was able to find, in compilations that had not been available to Prof. Yi, some additional Korean sources as well. In terms of the major currents of Korean histo-

3. Yi Pyŏng-do, *Hamel p 'yoryugi*, Ilchogak, Seoul, 1954.

ry, the 13-year captivity of Hamel and his colleagues was not of great significance. It had neither an immediate nor a long-term impact on Korea. But as a human interest story it was fascinating, and as an example of how the Korean government functioned in response to an unusual event, it has proven to be instructive to many readers. In reading these Korean materials, we get a concrete idea of how the government apparatus reacted and operated, in Seoul, in Cheju where the shipwreck occurred, and in Chŏlla province, where the Dutch captives were later sent. We see how the government responded on a humanitarian level by providing homes and employment for the sailors and allowing them to keep their own personal property and even some of the salvaged cargo for their own use and support. We see how the sailors' skills were assessed and exploited, how the sailors were punished when they tried several times to escape, how diplomacy was affected when their existence became known to the Manchus. We see how foreigners could fit into the Korean military and the local economy. We learn how their repatriation to the Dutch base at Nagasaki was eventually negotiated with the Japanese. The whole incident provides a wonderful view into Korea's inner workings, and researching it provided me with a very useful introduction to a whole range of primary source materials. In 1975, the Samjungdang publishing company published a Korean translation of my book without my knowledge or permission. Through negotiations between my publisher, the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, and Samjungdang, the whole affair was amicably settled and the Korean translation legitimatised. I was only upset that Samjungdang had given their translation, which was quite well done by Pak Yun-hŭi, the title of *Hamel p'yoryugi*, the same title that had been used by Yi Pyŏng-do. This caused much confusion.

Question: Let's talk about your work on Korean cartography. How did that come about, and what did you discover?

Answer: It was Bruce Cumings who was the crucial link in getting me involved in that subject. The University of Chicago Press was looking for a Koreanist whom they might consult in their project to publish a multi-volume history of world cartography. They were then in the midst of the East Asian section of that work and were considering the

Korea chapter. They asked Bruce to recommend somebody, and he gave them my name. After talking with the general editor of the project, Dr. David Woodward, and reviewing materials that he provided to me, I realized that this was a very well-organized and high-quality operation and that these volumes would have a permanent impact on the study of maps, and it would bring Korea to the attention of many people who might not otherwise ever think about Korea. As I researched the subject and reviewed the draft chapters on China and Japan, I discovered that Korea had a number of unique cartographic achievements that had no match in Chinese or Japanese cartography, and I was very happy to have the opportunity to introduce that material to an informed audience that was much broader than the field of Korean studies by itself.

Question: What were some of those achievements?

Answer: The first and in some ways the most spectacular was the world map known as the *Kangnido*, which was compiled in 1402. Earlier, Korean envoys had obtained cartographic material that had been compiled in the 1330s, during the period of Mongol rule in China. That material had been based in large part on Islamic sources. Basically, Korean mapmakers had obtained a Chinese map of China that had added the Islamic world and Africa, plus northern Asia and a recognizable outline of Europe. To this, the Koreans added outlines and details of Korea, Ryūkyū, and Japan, thereby incorporating most of the world apart from the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, and Antarctica, which of course had not yet been "discovered." If you look at the kind of European maps that Columbus is likely to have seen before his voyage in 1492, none of them can match the *Kangnido*. David Woodward was so impressed by this that he put the *Kangnido* on the cover of the East Asian volume of *The History of Cartography*, and it has since gained the attention and respect of the world. In addition to that, there was the *Chŏnhado*, which is closer to a folk map of the world. It was based on an original Korean interpretation of the ancient Chinese *Classic of the Mountains and Seas* (*Shanhaijing*). Although the Chinese wrote the book, it was the Koreans who mapped a significant portion of its data, and in a way that was both imaginative

and amusing. Then there are the great national maps by Chŏng Sang-gi (18th century) and Kim Chŏng-ho (19th century), which for their beauty, thoroughness, and accuracy go cartographically far beyond anything produced by their time in China or Japan. I found that the study of maps had links with many other sub fields in Korean studies —art, science, mathematics and mensuration, national defense and diplomacy, *sirhak* studies, absorption of western technology, just to name a few. It was quite an eye-opener for me. But the thing that gave me the greatest pleasure was that, in terms of space and the number of illustrations, my chapter on Korea was given a prominence reflecting Korea as a major force in East Asian culture, not just a token and minor exposure, as too often happens to Korea in general Western publications on East Asia.

At Conference on Korean Confucianism, Bellagio, Italy, with Ko Pyŏng-ik (right) and Kim Yŏng-gŏn of City University of New York (Summer 1981).

Question: Among your other publications that we haven't yet discussed, what are the ones that you think are the most significant and best reflect your work?

Answer: Well, probably the most widely read thing I have ever published is my article, "Galloping Along with the Horseriders, Looking for the Founders of Japan." It is a critique of Egami Namio's famous book, *The Horserider State: An Approach to Ancient Japanese History*.[4] Egami, a specialist in Central Asian history, wrote from outside the community of Japanese historians of Japan, and caused quite a furor with his thesis that the Japanese state had been founded by horserid ingin vaders from the Asian continent. He imagined that the

4. Egami Namio, *Kiba minzoku kokka: Nihon kodaishi e no apurōchi*, Iwanami, Tokyo, 1960, 14th printing, 1970.

closest Korean connection to these "horseriding" invaders would have been the "Chinwang," who according to Chinese sources dominated Samhan politics in the southern Korean peninsula in the 3rd century. I thought that the Chinwang was too early for this role, and that in general Egami's understanding of the Korean connections was wrong. On the other hand, I admired the panache of his theory, which seriously proposed that non-Japanese outsiders founded the Japanese state. If there were such outsiders, they could only have gotten to Japan from Korea, and if that were the case, one would have to consider the Korean politics of the 4th century, a period of militarism and war during which the definitive forms of the peninsular "Three Kingdoms" were established. I linked the process to the wars between Paekche and Koguryŏ, and Koguryŏ's period of dominance in Shilla politics. Of the three kingdoms, Paekche played the greater role in terms of a cultural impact on Japan. Whether or not there were "horseriding" warriors — and there are many critics of this idea both in Japan and internationally — there was certainly an age of militarism, which left a huge impact on both Korea and Japan in the 4th century. My paper was an analysis of this matter. It is well known among historians of Japan in Europe and North America, and has also attracted some attention in Japan, but I am afraid it would be too difficult to go into all the details here.

Question: Has there been much reaction in Korea to this paper?

Answer: Not to my knowledge. The most outspoken advocate of a Korean involvement in the founding of the Japanese state seems to be Wontack Hong (Hong Won-t'aek), an economist but also a very imaginative historian who writes from outside the community of Korean historians of Korea. He finds a large Paekche role in the founding of the Japanese state,5 and frequently refers to my article, sometimes agreeing with it, sometimes not.

Continuing with some of my more important papers, I might cite my "Yin and Yang in the China-Manchuria-Korea triangle," which was

4. Wontack Hong, *Paekche of Korea and the Origin of Yamato Japan*, Kudara International, Seoul, 1994.

an attempt to construct a chronological and thematic framework for the interactions between Korean, Manchurian, and Chinese history. I conceived of "Yin" and "Yang" phases in the various dynasties in the three regions. "Yang" marked periods of integration, stability, and cultural transfers, while "Yin" characterized periods of instability, decline, and war. It's not easy to give a very nuanced account of all of this in an interview of this kind, but I laid out a framework and some tables dividing East Asian history into three major periods from the Han dynasty in China to the end of the 19th century. I can't say that this article had anything like the popularity of the Horserider paper, but over the years I've been pleased by the reactions to it from scholars of Chinese and Korean history in the West.

Finally, I'd like to mention "Confucianism and War: the Korean Security Crisis of 1598." This focused on a famous incident that occurred toward the end of the Imjin Wars, when Korea tried to defend a Chinese general, Yang Hao, who had fought very hard against the Japanese forces in the Ulsan area but who was defeated in the end and suffered many casualties. The Ming Chinese government ordered his arrest and return to China to face charges of incompetence. Since King Sŏnjo believed that Yang Hao was one of the few Chinese generals who really fought hard, he had been outspoken in his support for Yang. But that support led to a Ming investigation of Korea itself, putting Sŏnjo in a very difficult position. His reaction was to resign his throne, and he did so, citing what he considered to be absolutely binding considerations of loyalty, manifested in terms that resonated deeply with Neo-Confucian belief. His officials meanwhile protested that he do his duty, and return to the throne. A week of crisis went by in which Sŏnjo was on strike against his own bureaucracy. But it in effect, it was also a strike against the Ming government. Ultimately he was persuaded to return to the throne and direct a campaign of exhortation, propaganda, and public demonstrations in support of Yang Hao, together with a slowdown of supplies to Ming troops. All of this put pressure on the Ming court. While Yang Hao had to return to China, Snjo was eventually vindicated. But the major result was the defeat of the anti-war (i.e. anti-Korea) forces in the Ming court and the vindication of those who supported Korea, leading to a massive Ming mobilization. In the end the Japanese were forced by military pressure, and especially naval

pressure both Chinese and Korean, to evacuate, ending the war. The whole episode highlighted the diplomatic complexities of the Chinese-Korean alliance.

Also in connection with the Imjin Wars, I have studied a remarkable painting by a Chinese painter who worked under a Ming general, Chen Lin. It is a long scroll which depicts six scenes: the arrival of a Ming fleet in Korea; a Ming-Korean siege of a Japanese fortress; a naval blockade of the same fortress by Chinese and Korean ships (the latter even with T ảegŭk flags!); the great naval battle off Noryang on Namhae Island (in which Yi Sun-shin lost his life); and a mop-up campaign against Japanese remnants in the hills. The final scene shows some of them being pushed off a cliff on Namhae Island. I have made a detailed study of this painting, which I have long wanted to publish. The trouble is that the original painting, which in the late 60s and early 70s was owned by a Chinese resident of San Francisco, was sold by him around 1972 or 1973 to a Chinese buyer who has never been identified. The painting has simply disappeared. There is a complete set of pictures and some color details, of which I have copies. Some of these were published in an article I wrote for *Shin Tong ả* in 1978, but I would love to be able to publish *all* of the pictures, which are owned by an American scholar. But it would be quite expensive to publish them, and I have not succeeded in finding an American publisher who is willing to pay the costs. My efforts continue, however, and I hope that someday this great painting — a horizontal scroll that might be five or six meters long and depicts thousands of Korean, Chinese and Japanese soldiers, and also many ships and various weapons — can be properly brought to the attention of Korean historians.

Question: How did you come to know about this painting? And I ỉm curious about that fortress. Did the Japanese have a fortress in Korea?

Answer: It was brought to my attention by a Chinese scholar who was very well known in the United States, the late Fang Chaoying, who had many interests including Korean books of all kinds. He saw the pictures, which were brought to an academic conference on Ming warfare which was held in California in the late 1960s, and told me about

them, and I was able to get a set of the photographs. Professor Fang never saw the actual painting himself, but a Chinese art collector who lives in America did manage to see the painting before it disappeared. As for the fortress, there were actually several of them. The one near Sunch ʾŏn is vividly depicted in the painting, and there are some very interesting ruins which survive today, as well as many concrete references in the *Sŏnjo shillok*. I visited the Sunch ʾŏn fortress, which is named Yegyo in the *Shillok*, in 1974, and in 1978, while I was a visiting scholar at Kyemyŏng University in Taegu, I made a tour of some of the others. There was a string of them along the southeastern coast, stretching from Ulsan to Sunch ʾŏn. There are interesting ruins in a park in downtown Ulsan, and a rather spectacular set of remains in Sŏsaengp ʾo, about 40 kilometers south of Ulsan on the east coast. I also visited the rather spotty ruins of another Japanese fortress on Namhae Island, which is also shown on the painting. Here my notebook and picture taking attracted the suspicion of some coastal security officers. When I spoke in Korean with them, it was almost as if they became more alarmed, wondering if I wasn ʾt a spy! Fortunately I had with me some good identification and my invitation letter from Kyemyŏng University, and I guess my account of what I was doing seemed credible enough, and after a pleasant chat with them, I moved on.

Travels in Korea and a Visit to P ʾy ˇongyang

Question: That sounds like an interesting trip. Have you traveled much within Korea?

Answer: Not as much as I would have liked, because I really enjoy the Korean countryside. But I have taken advantage of some good opportunities. In 1968, a representative of the Peace Corps invited me to drive with him on a trip to visit some volunteers who were working in that area, and I had a gorgeous tour of some really impressive landscape. In those days Kangwon was still relatively undeveloped, compared with now. There were some really hair-raising spots in the mountains where the road was so narrow and the precipice so steep that I insisted on getting out of the car and walking! Several times we

were ferried over some pretty wide and fast flowing rivers on relatively small rafts operated by a few men with poles and ropes. I've never forgotten that trip, and I'm glad I had a chance to see the people and life of that area before the highway engineers wrought all their changes. Beyond that, I think I have visited all the provinces and major islands of Korea with the exception of the Hamgyŏng provinces in the north. I've hiked in the mountains close to Seoul, on Hallasan and Chirisan, and in the north on Myohyangsan. I tried very hard to get to the Kŭmgangsan area when I was in the north, but in negotiating the schedule of activities with my North Korean hosts, it was decided it would take too much time away from some things I wanted to do, and other things that I had to do out of consideration for their own desires. I think it's very important for a scholar of Korea to have a good idea of the country as a whole. Over the years, one of my favorite Korean books to read — although I haven't so far dealt with it in a scholarly way — is the *Taengniji*, by the 18th century writer Yi Chung-hwan. He had a marvelous sense of the shapes and forces (*hyŏngse*) of the land, and how they conditioned economic life and other aspects of Korea's history. My only regret is that I didn't start reading it until I had done most of my own traveling, because I'm sure that with the benefit of his insights I would have been able to better appreciate the places I visited.

Question: You were able to go to North Korea when its life and affairs were more settled and stable than they have been in recent years. Did you have any particular research in mind in going there?

Answer: I think you're right that conditions are very different now, although I haven't had an opportunity to go there more recently and see for myself. My purpose in going was simply to experience the north so that I would have a sense of the whole country. While I have always followed contemporary Korean affairs closely and have published on unification and other political issues, I have not done serious research in that area, and my trip was not a research trip in the strict sense. But I did want to do what I could to encourage more scholarly contact between the north and North American scholars. As chairman of Columbia's Korea Seminar for many years, I had invited the UN diplomats from the DPRK to Columbia, and I had been among the sponsors

of an invitation that resulted in two North Korean historians participating in a program at the annual meeting of the Mid-Atlantic region of the Association for Asian Studies in Washington in 1985. That meeting went reasonably well. It was the first time that North Korean scholars had come to the U.S., and I think they were pleased at their reception. They urged me to visit the DPRK, and I followed up and made application for a visit the following year, 1986. That trip looked like it would happen, so I also arranged to spend some time in China under the sponsorship of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). But for some reason known only in P'y?ngyang, the DPRK part of the trip fell through, and instead I spent extra time touring Korean studies centers in Jilin and Liaoning provinces and in Yanbian, during which I met many interesting people and learned much. In 1988, I applied again, and this time things went smoothly. I went as an individual scholar, not as a part of a group, and spent eleven days seeing the country on what my hosts called a "one-man delegation."

Question: What were some of the things you were able to do in P'yŏngyang?

Answer: Well, a lot of the time was spent, as I expected, on the usual tour, which included the Juche Tower, Man'gyŏngdae, the Library and the People's Study Hall, musical and acrobatic performances, the Friendship Museum at Myohyangsan (where the myriad gifts given by foreign leaders or "Juche study groups" to Kim Il Sung were on display in a huge and solemn exhibition hall), etc. My hosts also wanted me to visit Panmunjŏm, but I declined. I've always considered Panmunjŏm to be a symbol of the division of Korea, and have never visited it from the south, and I told the guides I wouldn't visit it from the north either. They dropped the idea without objection. The ceremonial and political sites were not at all uninteresting, and I certainly did find them to be of value. And it is simple courtesy to show respect for one's hosts and visit attractions that they are proud of. They also wanted me to meet with an official of the foreign ministry and a group of scholars from the Institute of International Affairs, and I was happy to do that. Both occasions were long and interesting discussions of Korea-related issues, completely free of propaganda and pos-

turing. They asked me my own personal views of things and I gave them exactly and frankly. I enjoyed both discussions and admired the skill, if not always the substance, of their arguments against them in the many instances where we differed.

As for the more academic activities, I wanted to examine the exhibits in the historical museums, visit with scholars whose work I had read, speak with archaeologists and if possible visit some tombs with wall paintings. I also wanted to visit the Unsan gold mining area, since I had done some research for a descendant of its American developer, Leigh J. Hunt, and knew something of its notorious history as an exploitative concession during the bad old days of the decade between 1895 and 1905. Apart from Unsan, which I had thought was a long shot and would probably be rejected anyway, I got to do just about everything that I had hoped to. I met with both Pak Shi-hyŏng and Kim Sŏk-hyŏng, both of whom had done important work on early Korean relations with Japan, which related to my "horserider" research. Pak was highly connected in the North Korean academic world and was obviously an important personage. Kim, on the other hand, looked as if he were not in good health. Both of us were uneasy over the stenographer who recorded our conversation. My meeting with him had at first been refused on the ground that he was not in P'yŏngyang at that time. I was disappointed because, of the two it was Kim's work,[6] which I had read in the Japanese edition, in which I was most interested. But a day or so after I had met Pak, I was told that the schedule for that day would be altered to include a meeting with Kim, who had "suddenly" arrived in the capital. Most of the half-hour that we had together concerned his theory that the various Korean kingdoms anciently had "little" countries "(*soguk*) in Japan which were extensions of Koguryŏ, Paekche, Kaya, or Shilla. In the general discussion of this theory in the ROK, these are usually referred to as "branch countries "(*pun ġuk*). In recent scholarship, the importance of the immigrant communities in early Japan from the various Korean kingdoms is recognized, and their cultural contributions widely acknowl-

6. Kim Sŏk-hyŏng, *Ch ȯgi Cho-Il kwan ġye yŏn ġu*, DPRK Academy of Social Sciences, P'yŏngyang, 1966. The Japanese edition is *Kodai Chō-Nichi kankeishi*, translated by the Chōsenshi Kenkyūkai, Keisō shobō, Tokyo, 1969, 6th printing 1974.

edged. Kim went much further in arguing that there were close ties between them and the home kingdoms. I believe that this theory often reaches too far beyond the supporting proof, but whether or not these communities were calculated political extensions from Korea, there is no question that they could have been in touch with the homeland and to a degree in cooperation with it. But the breadth and depth of Kim's research is overwhelming, and his book is an excellent example of the kinds of research done by North Korean scholars in the early 1960s, which was really the golden age of North Korean historical scholarship. After 1966, historians in the north lost the creative atmosphere in which different views could coexist and contend with each other. Kim and Pak had flourished in that time, and I was very pleased that I could meet with both of them. It was an especially sad moment when I parted from Kim.

The most enduring impressions I have of my visit to the DPRK come from my visits to three ancient tombs which all had spectacular wall paintings from the fourth and fifth centuries. The earliest one, which contains an inscription with a date equivalent to 357, was An'ak No. 3, in a cluster of three tombs not far from Sariwn in North Hwanghae province; the other two were Tomb No. 2 in the Kangsŏgun group, and the Tŏkhŭngni tomb a couple of kilometers away from it, west of P'yŏngyang. They are among the most famous and important of the many tombs with wall paintings that are found in the DPRK. They are virtual underground apartments, obviously built for significant figures. As far as I know, very few people are allowed to visit such tombs, and of foreigners from the West apart from professional archaeologists, I'm not sure there are very many who have had the honor of being admitted into one of them, let alone three. I'm very grateful that I could have the opportunity to experience these unique and remarkable historical sites. An interesting incident occurred at An'ak No. 3. Apparently some provincial party people had heard of my visit and had appeared at the site to join me, my two guides, and several officials from the Academy of Social Sciences in P'yŏngyang to see the famous tomb. The archaeologist in charge protested that with so many people breathing inside the tomb, the humidity would be too high and could damage the paintings. But it was clear that he did not have the power to stop them, and there were at least ten of us down there for about ten

minutes. By the time we left, moisture was flowing down the walls in streams, and the archeologist was very distraught. I had been told on the first day I was in the DPRK that there was a full replica of the tomb, exact down to the last detail, in the Historical Museum in P'yŏngyang, and there was no need to go to the site. But my disappointment must have been palpable, for the guides relented and approved the visit. But afterwards I seriously regretted that I had asked for it. I can only hope that the wall paintings suffered no damage as a result.

Korea Studies at Columbia

Question: You came to Columbia in 1964, and you came to a department that up until that time had only Chinese and Japanese studies. You were the first person at Columbia to have a permanent position in Korean Studies. But at that time, the field as a whole had still not developed very much. What was the general state of Korean studies at that time?

Answer: You're right. Very few "East Asian studies" departments in the 50s and early 60s had any representation of Korea at all. Actually, by the time that I came, Columbia had already made a modest beginning in that direction; I was not the first Korea specialist to teach here. Peter Lee had taught briefly at Columbia in the 50s, and Professor William Skillend had accepted an invitation to teach Korean language and literature here in 1962. If he had wished to continue at Columbia I don't think there would have been any opportunity for me. As it was, he and his wife decided they wanted to live and work in their home country, England, and so a niche opened up just at the right time for me. Ironically, my name had originally come to the attention of Columbia not as a specialist in Korean Studies, but in Chinese historical linguistics. One of my Berkeley professors, Chen Shih-hsiang, heard about Columbia's desire to offer a course in that field, and without my knowledge suggested me as a possible candidate. When I was interviewed by Wm. Theodore de Bary for that position, I said, yes, I would be interested in that, but my principal goal was to specialize in Korea. That was fine with Prof. de Bary; he was quite happy to kill two

birds with one stone. I did teach Chinese historical linguistics for about four years, but after that I became a full-time Korea person. Even before that time, de Bary and other senior faculty, in order to make me feel more at home, changed the name of the department from“ Chinese and Japanese ”to“ East Asian Languages and Cultures. ” As to the situation at other universities, the Korean program at Harvard had begun with Edward Wagner ’s appointment in 1959. There was also an earlier program at the University of Washington, then oriented mainly toward Korean literature and headed by Prof. Suh Doo-soo (Sŏ Tu- su). As far as Korean history was concerned, in addition to Wagner there was my mentor, Michael Rogers, at Berkeley. I guess I was the third person to obtain a full-time, permanently designated position.

Question: Could you say something about how the King Sejong professorship came into existence? Was this funded by the Korea Foundation?

Answer: From my first appointment as an instructor in 1964, and through all my promotions as a tenured professor at Columbia, my position as“ Professor of Korean ”was funded completely from the general university budget, but it had never had a specific endowment fund to support it. During the negotiations between Columbia and the Korea Foundation concerning the endowment grant, Columbia made a commitment to maintain its 100% funding for that position, and the Korea Foundation agreed to contribute to endowments only for new professorships. As a token of good faith, Columbia established a separate fund for my position, but it went beyond that and upgraded it to a named professorship. I was consulted on what the name should be. From the beginning I wanted a name which was completely beyond politics and made no reference to any business or foundation, but rather stood unambiguously as a symbol for Korean culture. And I could not think of any name better than“ King Sejong ”to project that image. The university had asked me to suggest three names, and to make arguments for and against each. I can tell you I spent much more time thinking about the other two than I did about the first. In the end I came up with the“ Yi Sun-shin ”or“ Ch ’ungmugong ”Professor, and the“ March First ”Professor. But when I tried the names out on my

Korean friends, they were unanimous that the best was "King Sejong." Very few of them liked the idea of naming the chair after a military man, however great Yi Sun-shin was. And "March First" violated my own rule to be above politics, since it very much emphasizes South Korean political legitimacy given the fact that North Korean historians criticize the March First movement, however patriotic it was, as ineffectual and bourgeois. "King Sejong" easily cuts through all north-south differences. There never was any contest.

Needless to say, I feel it a very great honor to have been the first to bear this title. The reaction to it has been very much as I had hoped, both from Koreans and non-Koreans alike. When I think about it, King Sejong was in a way the inventor of Korean studies. Whether he was working on the alphabet, or music, or medicine, or even astronomy and the calendar, he followed the same procedure: he studied carefully what the Chinese books said on the problem at hand, and then considered the special Korean circumstances in each case. His solutions were always made to fit Korean circumstance. And that is also my definition for Korean studies. I am suspicious of theory and preconceived paradigms, especially ones that have originated in the West, as valid standards for studying Korea. For me, Korean circumstance must drive any question being studied, both as to substance and approach. The correct understanding of any Korean issue must come out of Korean circumstance itself. This approach keeps me very close to the sources, and people who have read my work may have noticed that I make frequent use of translation and like to present Korean voices as authentically as I can. Of course that requires judgment, and any scholar can be wrong in trying to determine those circumstances. One can only try to do his best.

Current State of Korean Studies

Question: I'd like to get back now to some general questions about the progress of Korean studies, both at Columbia, and more broadly in North America generally. How would you characterize the development that has taken place during your career?

Answer: When I began teaching at Columbia in 1964, there were perhaps from twelve to fifteen universities that had serious, well-rounded programs in what was then coming to be called "East Asian studies," but of these, only five had anything that could be called Korean studies. However, it must be said that there were a number of professors in the U.S. who did individual research on Korea in universities where there was no established Korean studies program. Of the five major programs — Harvard, University of Washington, Columbia, Berkeley, and Princeton — Berkeley didn't offer regular courses in the Korean language until the late 1960s, and Princeton decided to drop Korean studies around the same time. Most universities with generally good programs in Chinese and Japanese studies made no effort to expand into Korean studies. By the standards of that time, one could say that a university had Korean studies if it had at least one regular professorial position in the Korean field, at least a two-year program in the Korean language, and a research library that had begun to collect Korean books. That's a minimum definition, so you can see that even those with Korean programs were nowhere near the standards of most Chinese and Japanese programs. Nowadays, I would guess that there are around fifteen universities that have Korean studies, and the standard would now be between two and five regular professorial positions, three to four years of language training, a library with a minimum of 5,000 to 10,000 books in Korean (although the best programs have many times that number), M.A. and Ph.D. degree programs, and an affiliated East Asian or other research institute that can host visiting scholars, offer public lectures and movies, outreach programs, and other general services. Perhaps a third of the Korean programs can exceed these standards in most of the categories. We have come a long way, but we still have far to go if the goal is some reasonable level of parity with the Chinese and Japanese programs. And there are still "East Asian" studies programs at major universities that do not have Korean programs at all.

Question: Could you fill in some details on how that development proccurred?

Answer: It wasn't all steady progress; there were also some revers-

es. One thing that occurs to me is the negative impact of the oil crises of the 1970s, which impacted college and university budgets across the spectrum. They hit just as the first generation of graduate students was coming out of the earlier programs. It's fair to say that the budget limitations hit all of East Asian studies, but the Chinese and Japanese programs suffered much less than the Korean ones because they had already achieved a high level of operations. In Korean studies there were quite a few people who finished their Ph.D. programs but were never able to find a decent position in the field and had to go into some other kind of work, thus wasting their training. Others dropped out before completing the Ph.D. If that had not happened, we would be much further along today than we are. That's a negative factor in the development. On the positive side, during the 70s and early 80s, the Korean economy really took off, and people in the United States and Canada began to see a large variety of consumer products that gave Korea a higher visibility and a more positive image among average people. They began to take Korea more seriously, and that in turn began to have an effect on the choices made by both university students and administrations. Up until that time and reaching to the end of the 1980s, if there was any news in the paper about Korea at all, it was usually negative — authoritarian governments, the Yushin constitution, human rights abuses," Korea Gate, "assassinations, Kwangju, the persecution of Kim Dae-jung, etc. But by the late 1980s and for the first time in Korea's modern history, the economic news seemed to provide a countervailing" good "story in American newspapers, and that was complemented by the first positive steps toward democracy. Another major development during the 1980s was the arrival on university campuses all over the country of significant numbers of Korean-American students. There had always been a few, of course, but now they came in droves and were highly visible on the campus. They wanted courses on Korean history, language, and culture. This forced the broadening of Korean studies in North American universities, which up until then had generally emphasized graduate training. Now undergraduate courses and majors on Korea made their appearance across the continent. The downside was that those of us doing the Korean studies had to work a lot harder. During the 80s and early 90s, I always taught one or two more courses than the average teaching

load. But after all the years when Korea was the weak younger sibling in East Asian programs, it was a nice problem to have. It raised the visibility and the leverage of Korean specialists in their own departments and among their colleagues in Chinese and Japanese studies. Now we were able to make persuasive arguments for more faculty positions, n a while we began to get them.

Question: I guess this is the point where we should discuss some of the questions surrounding funding. This seems to have been a particularly vexed issue in our field, but hardly an issue at all in Chinese and Japanese studies. Why is this?

At Conference on East Asia and the World Economy in the 16th and 17th Centuries, Hawaii, with Yi Tae-jin at left (January 1987).

Answer: The last part of the question is the easiest. The commitment to Chinese and Japanese studies was there from the beginning. At the major universities where they were already established before World War II, they were funded from within the University budgets, and that situation continued in the 1940s and 50s. Universities who didn't yet have such programs needed them to be regarded as "major," and they also committed their own budgets, occasionally helped by a wealthy alumni donor. That wave of development was generally over by the end of the 1950s. During the same decade, the federal government and some major foundations also promoted area studies, and placed great importance on East Asian studies. Those universities with existing programs thrived with this new source of funding, which largely went into strengthening language study and student fellowships. Korean studies did benefit from these funding sources from the 60s on, but unfortunately they still had very weak foundations and had only a limited capacity to qualify for the funds. So the strong got stronger and the

weak stayed weak.

This situation was noticed in Korea, where people rightly saw that Americans in general were very uninformed concerning Korea, and that Korea did not enjoy good publicity and often had a bad image. But the bad image was also fed by the conditions created by the authoritarian governments run by the military. Money coming from that government, or business groups close to the government and dependent upon it, aroused suspicion and sometimes hostility.

Within the Korean studies community, two attitudes immediately arose. Some held that whatever the source of the money, putting it into the development of Korean studies could have a good result. They knew that the Korean funding sources might have ulterior motives — such as helping influential scholars who were in a position to voice opinions favorable to the Korean government — but reasoned that they could spend the money in a responsible way and show by their accounting and reporting that it had all been spent for legitimate academic purposes.

The other group stood on two basic principles: that it was wrong to accept money from an oppressive government, and that the core foundation of academic freedom is to act independently, without outside influences and conflicts of interest. They believed that such money was corrupt in its essence and thought that even without using such money, merely accepting it was corrupting. Moreover, it was an undoubted fact that there had been instances of spying on some of us in our classes in a half-baked attempt to find evidence that some professors of Korean studies were somehow "anti-Korean." The harassment of Bruce Cumings and interference with his students by the Korean Consulate in Chicago was an outrage. All of this created a bad atmosphere.

I belonged to the first group and was willing to accept the money in order to improve Korean studies at Columbia. I considered it my responsibility to make sure that any money received was spent responsibly for legitimate developmental purposes. I recognized that the scholars who were against the money were sincerely motivated, and I agreed that the issues they raised had to be taken seriously. But even if I had agreed completely with them, I would have to ask myself the question: If I refuse this money, our Korean program will miss an

opportunity to advance, and deserving students will not receive financial aid solely because of my actions. I felt that I did not have the moral right to harm their interests, but did have an obligation to help them along.

As things turned out, the early effort in Korea was not too well thought out, and the initiatives were neither funded adequately nor long lasting. In the 1970s and 80s Columbia did consider accepting funding from Korean business groups, but not much came of it. We did for a time have a cooperative relationship with Seoul National University. We received modest but much-appreciated support from the Korea Research Foundation, which was associated with the Ministry of Education. This helped our language teaching programs and provided some research and student support. The debate arose again after legislation in Seoul established the Korea Foundation in 1991. This put support for Korean Studies, as well as broader programs promoting Korean culture internationally, on a much firmer basis. Serious planning was done in Seoul, and it was efficiently put into operation, especially during the directorship of Son Chuwhan. For the first time endowment funds became available. Fellowship and library support was substantial. Universities around the world were able to make long term plans with assurance.

This program has had a major impact on our Korean studies, and in my view it has been all for the good. But those who had opposed the earlier programs also opposed the Korea Foundation. But this time, in my opinion, with much less justification. The Republic of Korea had become a much more democratic country, and the management of the programs was professional and competent. To be sure, the issue of independence is still germane. It troubles me that the major source of capital and fellowship funds for Korean studies is outside our country, and that however legitimate the Korea Foundation may be, it still answers to Korean authority and a Korean agenda. It should be exclusively up to American scholars to determine the course of development for our own Korean studies. Still, I am not aware of any unreasonable pressures from Korea, and I am very grateful for the help we have received. I only wish that there were some sense of responsibility in American government and financial circles for the growth and continuing excellence of American scholarship in international studies. I have

tried several times to get fund raisers both inside and outside my own university to look for support for our field at home rather than abroad. But they respond that if the Koreans want to fund it, why should we? This is a wrong headed, short sighted, and ultimately cynical attitude, which doesn't even show respect or appreciation for what Korea has done. It embarrasses me.

Future Plan for Korean Studies

Question: Well, we've discussed a lot of topics and could probably go on to raise many more, but I would like to conclude by asking you about the future. You've been retired now for two and a half years. What have you been doing, and what do you plan to be doing in the years ahead?

Answer: The only thing I've given up is classroom teaching. I try to keep up with the field; I continue to give public talks on Korean subjects; and I am still researching and writing on Korean history. My long project on the writings of Hong Taeyong, an 18th century *sirhak* scholar, is just about ready to be submitted to a publisher. I have plans for a one-volume history of Korea. I have written four chapters so far, and there will be about twenty more. This project will take several more years at least. I have written two articles recently and one of them, on Kang Wansuk, a Korean Catholic martyr of 1801, will be published sometime this year. The other, on the connections with early Korean history of the so-called "Eastern barbarians" (Tong'i) mentioned in ancient Chinese sources, still needs more work and research. But that topic fascinates me and I will definitely finish it. By the time all that is done, I very much hope that I'll continue with still other projects that I haven't thought of yet. Beyond that, I am still the advisor for a few graduate students who began their work under my sponsorship, and I will stick with them until their theses are defended. I do occasional work for the Korea Society on their outreach programs to educate American school teachers about Korea. I haven't been to Korea for the last several years, but I hope that not too much time goes by before I visit the country again.

Question: We'll be watching. Thank you very much!

Chronology

1953	Enters Army Language School (now Defense Language Institute), Monterey, California, June 1953-June 1954; Graduated 4th in Korean Class K-26
1958	Graduates University of California, Berkeley, B.A. with Highest Honors in Chinese
1963	Graduates University of California, Berkeley, M.A., Chinese Language and Literature
1966	Graduates University of California, Berkeley, Ph.D., Chinese Language and Literature
1966	Assistant Professor, Columbia University in the City of New York
1977	Professor of Korean, Columbia University
1994	King Sejong Professor of Korean Studies, Columbia University
2001	King Sejong Professor of Korean Studies Emeritus, Columbia University

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