

Special Feature

Globalization and Korean History Education in English in Korea

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Introduction

In 2007, we started planning our project “Teaching Korean History in English.” At the time, the pressure to teach and learn in English was already present, but not as much as now. In 2008, we initiated a two-year project “Korean History and Culture in English” designed to teach Korean history to foreign students at Yonsei University’s Wonju campus. However, Korean students ended up being the majority of the class.

English immersion education in universities is a relatively new trend. Most of our Korean students tell us that they take the courses in order to improve their English. To them, even Korean history courses are just a means of improving their English. They obsess about learning English because it is so vital in the job market. In order to be noticed by prestigious companies, they not only have to show good TOEIC scores, but also often have to go through interviews conducted in English. The kind of obsession this generation has with English, therefore, is probably something beyond the comprehension of those of us who were educated in the 1980s and 1990s.

Many Korean universities are now racing to have their pre-existing departments develop courses taught in English. Increasingly, more universities are taking into consideration the ability to teach in English when evaluating their professors. Consequently, professors in Korean history and literature departments are now required to teach in English. At other times, students in Korea have been educated in a foreign language, but never to this extent. Why and how did this happen? What about teaching Korean studies in English in Korea? Is it really worth providing English immersion education in Korean history to Korean students in Korea?

We are midstream in offering courses in English. Korean history courses are no exception. There is a strong demand from university

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administrations as well as government education policy to increase the number of Korean history courses offered in English. In this article, the authors examine why Korean history courses are beginning to be taught in English. There are two reasons. The first is the ranking system which was initiated by the mass media. The second is the government's educational policy which requires Korean universities to increase the number of courses taught in English. Korean history educators are also obliged to follow these trends. We will discuss the university ranking system which was introduced by the mass media. Then we will look at its effect on academia. Even professors of Korean history whom one would expect to be somewhat shielded from the craze, are feeling social pressure to teach in English. We will discuss the way to approach this issue. Before we begin, however, we have to confess that this is the first time we have ever written about a contemporary social issue. As historians, we are accustomed to investigating historical documents and studying historical issues of pre-modern Korea. We will nevertheless try to express the various thoughts and ideas that occurred to us while we taught these courses for the past two years.

Globalization, English, and Korean Universities

Historical Approach

Being able to speak fluent English has become so important in Korea that the government is talking about making public high schools conduct most of their classes in English. As historians, we are aware that this is not the first time a foreign language has taken over the education of the Korean people. Before Koreans had their own writing system, Chinese characters were introduced to Korea through the transmission of the Confucian classics (Association of Korean History Teachers 2005:19). Beginning in 372 when the Goguryeo court first founded an institute, Taehak (태학), and taught Chinese classics to noblemen, the Korean government often promoted education in foreign languages. But even then, they could not have taught Chinese and others subjects in Chinese. When classical Chinese became the language of official documents in the late ninth century, many people of Unified Silla who did not even belong to one of the privileged classes started to go to Tang China in order to

get an education. Later, the same people returned to Silla and played an important role in the founding of the Goryeo dynasty. During the Mongolian occupation of Goryeo, many sons of the literati went to Yuan China to learn Chinese as well as Mongolian. Some of them returned to spread neo-Confucianism, upon which the founding philosophy of Joseon was at least partly based (Lee 2009). In pre-modern and modern Korean society, it was very important for a nobleman to be able to write well in Chinese. In medieval East Asia, Chinese took the role played by Latin in medieval Europe. However, it was pronounced differently in Korea, China and Japan. Though King Sejong invented the Korean characters (Hangeul) in 1446, hangeul was mainly used by women and common people who did not have access to education. Chinese remained the official language of the government. Using Chinese characters made it easy for Korea to adapt to China's cultural advancements, and to participate in cultural and economic exchanges with other East Asian countries. People from Korea, China, and Japan could communicate through written Chinese even though they all spoke different languages.

When Japan annexed Korea, Japanese was made the official language of Korea and the Korean language was banned from schools. This was the policy, "Killing of the Korean Language," which was used as a tool to oppress the Korean people. This policy inspired Koreans to start a movement to protect, revive, and develop the Korean language. When the U.S. military started to settle in South Korea after the liberation, English became the most important foreign language. Those who could fluently speak English took the most important and powerful positions in Korean society, and many elites of the 1950s and 1960s dreamt of getting an education at an American university.

As Korea's overall living standards improved, the social implications of English also became more important. However, it seems that English education has never been as important as it is now. In some private grade schools and high schools, subjects other than English are being taught in English, which is a kind of phenomenon that was unthinkable in the past (Lee 2009).

To master a foreign language is to climb up the social ladder to become an elite. Foreign languages, like Chinese, Japanese and English, have been, or are, languages of the elite. In this respect, the two phenomena are similar. The difference is that, in the past, only a small number of the upper class enjoyed the opportunity to receive a Chinese

education. Currently, everybody has an equal opportunity to study English in the public Korean education system. In the pre-modern period, Korean students learned Chinese, but they merely achieved competence in reading Chinese text. The purpose of that language education was to acquire scientific knowledge from the text. The focus of language education was not to master the Chinese language. Therefore students in the pre-modern period could not speak Chinese. In contrast, in modern language education the primary aim is to master the English language. So students should improve speaking in addition to writing and reading ability. Hence, this is the very first time for the Korean government to emphasize foreign language education for all Korean students.

Globalization and English

Because of the globalization brought on by the end of the Cold War in the mid-1980s and because of the revolution in information and communication technology in the 1990s, various other countries have already attempted to teach classes in English in public schools (Kim 2005:242). Globalization refers to the globalized economy based on new types of production, financial, and consumption systems. It characteristically consists of a world-wide economic system centered around knowledge, information and labor (Kim 2000). But the word also refers to worldwide cultural and political integration, such as the Americanization of various cultures around the world (Clayton 2004; Kim 2007:24).

When the Korean government, led by Kim Young Sam, announced in November 1994 that globalization would be its most important agenda item, only a few really understood what that would entail. At the time, the government's spokesperson stated that "globalization" is a concept that is more initiative-oriented and encompassing than "internationalization." He announced that the government would implement a full-blown open-door policy, explaining, 'globalization' is to strive towards the values universally endorsed by humanity while basing ourselves on our own traditional values—it will be our attempt to reach beyond the national borders and become the Korea of the world." At the time, the Korean government differentiated their policy from internationalization by translating the phrase as "total globalization." Because this was the name of a particular policy, the government sometimes used the equivalent Korean word

Segeubha (세계화) as a proper noun (Kim 2000; Lee 2009).

Globalization policies have received both praise and criticism. At one extreme, it is praised as an expansion of communication among nations and a turning point in the history of humanity. At the other extreme, it is criticized as propaganda created by imperialistic and powerful nations that will worsen inequality among nations and assimilate various cultures into a “one size fits all” Eurocentric one (Kim 2005).

The government’s effort to globalize Korea created the English craze by placing increasing emphasis on the importance of English as the common language of the world.¹ By the time we entered the twenty-first century, even parents of modest economic means were sending their young children away to schools in English-speaking countries. Since many of those children were too young to live without their parents, the mother often followed the young child, while the father stayed in Korea to finance the education. This phenomenon, called “goose daddy,” became quite common in large cities.² According to the Samsung Economic Research Institute, Koreans spend about 15 trillion *won* on private English education, which is half of the total expense of private education. To accommodate this explosion in demand, the government continually increased its effort to include more English education in public schools. Public schools are hiring more native English speakers as English teachers (Chae 2008).

English Immersion Education in Korean Universities

Korean universities cannot ignore the demand for education in English either. Many have established international undergraduate and graduate colleges. Even some of the traditional colleges within universities are competing to offer classes taught in English. KAIST (Korea Advanced

1. Having accepted globalization as inevitable, Japan is determined to strengthen its position in the international community and complete its own transformation. One measure that it is taking is to build up its communication capability by improving its English education (Kim 2005).

2. Among these families, some are successful and some not. It is not uncommon that the parents get divorced. There are even a few divorced fathers who commit suicide because of the financial difficulties.

Institute of Science and Technology) has announced its plan to conduct all its graduate courses in English by 2010. The Ulsan National Institute of Science and Technology (UNIST) and Pohang University of Science and Technology (POSTECH) each recently went public with their plan to have all aspects of campus life conducted mainly in English (Do 2010). Other major universities are also doing their best to increase the number of courses taught in English.³ University courses conducted in English were first created as electives for foreign exchange students and students from the universities' own international colleges. However, when the *Chosun Ilbo* and *JoongAng Ilbo* newspapers started taking into consideration the number of core courses conducted in English in ranking the schools, the schools had no choice but to offer lectures conducted in English even for subjects that seemingly had little to do with the language. The *Chosun Ilbo*'s ranking considers professors' performance in research (60 percent), student to faculty ratio (20 percent), evaluations from the graduates (10 percent), and "the level of globalization" (10 percent) (*Chosun Ilbo* 2009). "Globalization" is measured by the percentage of foreign faculty and foreign exchange students, so the number of lectures taught in English is irrelevant. Similarly, the *JoongAng Ilbo*'s ranking considers facilities and finance (100), level of globalization (70), professors' performance in research (120), and reputation and success of the graduates (110). When assessing the level of globalization, however, the *JoongAng Ilbo* also includes foreign students in degree programs as well as foreign and Korean exchange students, and the percentage of courses taught in English (*JoongAng Ilbo* Kyoyuk Gaebal Yeonkuso). Because the information they post on their Web site is very detailed and easy to use, universities do not have a choice but to pay attention to the ranking.

For example, Dongguk University's business school has allocated additional budget in order to have 90 percent of their courses taught in English by 2011 and recruited ten foreign students from English-speaking countries for the 2010 school year. They also try to encourage professors

3. According to the 2009 grade report from the Educational Testing Service (ETS), Koreans ranked 71st out of 157 countries, with an average of 81 points on the Internet-based Test (iBT) in 2009, up from 72 points in 2006, 77 in 2007 and 78 in 2008. However, despite the improvement in the overall score, Koreans were near the bottom in the speaking section. They posted an average speaking score of 19 points, below the world average of 19.7, and ranked 121st (Kwon 2010).

to teach in English by giving them the option of absolute evaluations and additional points for in-class evaluations (Kim 2010). Recently at Konkuk University, five core courses in history were taught in English so the school can be ranked higher by the *JoongAng Ilbo* newspaper. A newspaper's method of ranking universities determined a university's curriculum policy.

Consequently, it is becoming increasingly common for Korean universities to hire only those who can lecture in English. This eventually turned into a tendency to favor those who received their degrees in English-speaking countries.

The most recent ranking published by the *JoongAng Ilbo* newspaper allocates 4 percent of its evaluation to the number of core courses taught in English. Ten universities that are ranked at the top offer an average of 30 percent of their courses in English. The percentage increased noticeably since the *JoongAng Ilbo* began to use it as one of their evaluation criteria in 2006. Hanyang University, for example, increased the number of courses taught in English from 9 percent (147) to 23.36 percent (436 courses) since 2005.

Another factor was the Korean government's World Class University (WCU) Project that began in 2008. Its main aim is to increase Korean universities' educational and research competitiveness by recruiting foreign scholars of international caliber (Seo 2009).

According to *Kyosu sinmun* (Professors' Newsletter), 116 universities in Korea made 883 hires in 2009. Excluding hires in the medical field, ones with Ph.D. degrees account for 619 of the hires. Among these, 250 (40.4 percent) received their degrees in Korea; 369 (59.6 percent) obtained them overseas. Forty percent of the latter received their degrees in English-speaking countries, and the vast majority of those were from the United States (Kim 2009). There has been no objective assessment of the Korean media's evaluation of Korean universities. Despite the criticism that the media is abusing their university rankings for their own interests, such rankings have had substantial influence on universities' hiring policies (Choi 2010b).

In the Parliamentary Inspection of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in 2006, Senator Lee Seongkweon of the Hannara Party argued that it is pointless to take the candidate's nationality into consideration when hiring, and that public universities needed to be more active in hiring non-Korean professors in order to increase their

competitiveness. His point of view revealed a perspective of the power elite group in Korea and, in keeping with his statement, the number of professors who have a foreign nationality is increasing in Korea.

Table 1. Comparison of Numbers between Foreign Professors and Korean Professors at Korean Universities 2005-2009

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
University of Education	0 (798)	0 (857)	0 (855)	0 (812)	0 (805)
University	1597 (49,200)	1931 (51,859)	2212 (52,763)	2529 (54,331)	3111 (54,518)
University of Technology	96 (2,658)	80 (2,117)	93 (2,190)	117 (2,137)	39 (2,073)
Total	1693 (52,656)	2011 (54,833)	2305 (55,808)	2646 (57,280)	3150 (57,396)

Number in parentheses () is the number of Korean professors

According to the table above,⁴ the number of foreign faculty almost doubled in five years, from 1693 out of 52,656 (approximately 3 percent) to 3150 out of 57,396 (approximately 5.4 percent). There is no foreign professor at the university of education whose students become teachers at elementary schools. Eventually, it will be mandatory to hire foreign professors to support English immersion education for elementary schools. The number of foreign professors at universities of technology decreased in 2009. We can extrapolate that the cause of this decrease was the huge increase in the number of foreign professors at universities in 2009. Compared to the year of 2008, 582 foreign scholars were newly-hired in 2009. At the same time, 78 foreign professors left. It probably means that most of them moved to universities from universities of technology. It is predictable that universities will increasingly hire foreign professors to become globalized and obtain more points in the rankings.

What of the consumers of education, the students? According to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, more than 240,000 Koreans studied overseas in 2009. Despite the financial crisis of 2007 and

4. Table 1 was provided by the statistical service of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. We especially appreciate the official, Yunhee Im of MEST, who sent it by e-mail. This is a new service offered for free by the Korean government.

the fall of the Korean currency, the number of Koreans studying overseas only decreased by 1000 from 2007 to 2008.

Table 2. Comparison between Korean Students Studying Overseas and Foreign Students in Korea

Years	Korean Students Studying Overseas	Foreign Students in Korea
2007	217,959	32,056
2008	216,867	40,585
2009	243,224	50,591

According to Table 2, based on data from MEST,⁵ the number of foreign students who study in Korea is about one-fifth of its counterpart, but that number has also increased steadily in the past three years; the number of foreign students studying in Korea increased by 27 percent from 2007 to 2008, and again by 25 percent the following year. Because of the way the universities are ranked, they have an incentive to actively recruit foreign students. It probably also helped that they were starting to offer so many more courses in English.

Korean History Courses in English

Until the end of the twentieth century, there was not much connection between English and Korean history at Korean universities, especially for the core courses that were mainly geared towards Korean students. Foreign graduate students getting a Ph.D. in Korean history were no exception and this made it difficult for them to obtain a Ph.D. in Korean history. As we entered the twenty-first century, however, we realized that we were not as invulnerable to the English craze as we thought we were (Lee 2008). In the case of history departments, English immersion education first began with courses in European history and soon spread to those in Korean history. For obvious reasons, the best research in Korean history is conducted in Korea. However, it is unreasonable to expect these accomplished historians who have only received their education in Korea

5. Table 2 was cited from the homepage of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (http://www.mest.go.kr/me_kor/inform/science/science/high/index.html).

to suddenly lecture in English. That is why universities that want to offer more courses taught in English have been hiring an increasing number of historians who received their degrees overseas. The table below shows the number of foreign nationals who obtained their degrees overseas and were hired by history-related departments in Korean universities in the past five years.⁶

Table 3. Comparison of Numbers between Foreign Professors and Korean Professors in History-related Departments 2005-2009

Education Level	Foreign Professors in History-related Departments (Korean Professors)				
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
University	3(496)	3(538)	5(562)	7(577)	8(621)
Graduate School	-	1(3)	1(10)	1(29)	1(31)
Special Graduate School	1(7)	1(10)	1(16)	-(18)	-(30)
Online University	-(3)	-(4)	-(4)	-(4)	-(2)
Total	4(506)	5(555)	5(592)	8(628)	9(684)

Number in parentheses () is the number of Korean professors.

There were only nine such historians in 2009, but that number still is a significant increase from four in 2005. The number is likely to increase from now on.

So what is occurring in terms of hiring of those specializing in Korean history? In 2009, Seoul National University hired Milan Hejtmanek (specializing in the Joseon Period) as the very first foreign professor at Seoul University to specialize in Korean history (Wu 2009). Discussing the hire, the chair of the department Professor Myung-ho Noh stated, “This will be a good opportunity to see the way Western scholars understand Korean history, and to consider the way in which we present Korean history to the world” (Wu 2009). It is true that foreign scholars specializing in Korean history might be able to show students different ways of understanding Korean history. It will also be a lot easier for them to interpret Korean history as something more than a national history of a particular nation. Some other non-Korean historians that were hired

6. Table 3 was provided by the statistical service of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. We expect the number of foreign professors in history departments to increase steadily.

recently include Pankaj N. Mohan at the Academy of Korean Studies, Leighanne Kimberly Yuh (Modern Korean history) at Korea University, and Jihyung Kim (Modern East Asian history and Korean history) at Konkuk University.

There is no question that they will play an important role in globalizing Korean history. Professor Hejtmanek was in some way correct when he called himself Korea's Alexis de Tocqueville, for these non-Korean scholars specializing in Korean history might offer the kind of objective perspective that we as insiders cannot.⁷ Schmid pointed out that the limitations of one mode of Korean studies might be characterized as "Korean Studies for Korean Studies' sake"(Schmid 2008:10). Korean students who have learned Korean history not as Korean history but rather as "our" history, have a chance to learn it as conceived of by the West. This is useful information for the students, especially in this era of globalization. For most of them, it is also a cultural shock (Lee 2009). The way we perceive ourselves inevitably differs from the way others perceive us. Knowing how others perceive us can give us guidance as to how we should explain ourselves and make ourselves understood. College students who have gone through the public educational system in Korea have already taken many classes in Korean history. They have also encountered many versions of Korean history constructed by other Koreans through various cultural mediums. Learning Korean history from a completely different perspective enables them to broaden their understanding.

More difficult cases are foreign students who only have one chance to learn Korean history and get herded into classes taught by non-Korean professors just because they cannot speak Korean. Korean history classes taught by non-Korean professors in Korea will differ little from the ones taught in the United States or the United Kingdom. For example, quite a few Korean Americans and Korean children who have received most of their education overseas come to Korea in order to take summer courses in Korean history. How would they feel if they could only learn Korean history from professors who were educated outside of Korea? Korean friends living in the United States were quite irritated when they

7. Hyunsook Lee appreciates Professor Milan Hejtmanek for providing her with a great deal of inspiration and allowing her to audit one of his classes.

found out that the Korean history course they sent their children to take in Korea was exactly the same as one offered in the United States. We could imagine they were not comfortable watching their children learning a Korean history that was completely different from the one they had learned in Korea. They wondered why students were taught the version of Korean history understood by Western historians just because the lecture was conducted in English, and were disappointed in Korean universities. They also made us ashamed of ourselves by asking why we Korean teachers never did anything about it.

The source of this problem was obviously the fact that most Korean historians educated in Korea cannot speak English. Most of the lecturers who teach Korean history in Korea in English are historians who have received their degrees in an English-speaking country. Korean history, however, is a subject whose perspective and content differs substantially depending on whether it is taught in Korea or overseas. Because there are some approaches to general issues taught outside of Korea that the majority of historians in Korea do not agree with, we felt the need to design such a course.⁸ It is very difficult for those of us who studied in Korea to develop our skills in English because the most important additional language we need to study Korean history is classical Chinese. Lecturing in English is an especially difficult task because English education in Korea focuses mostly on reading and writing. We need to find a way to make sure that at least some Korean historians educated in Korea can accommodate the growing demands for courses taught in English.

In order to do this, both undergraduate and graduate programs should design curriculums that can improve their students' English skills. One good way to do this, for example, would be to design a course that surveys the kind of research on Korean history that has been conducted in Western countries. Another way would be to offer a Korean history

8. One such example would be that of Kim Gu, who is revered by Koreans as the father of Korean nationalist movement during the Japanese annexation, and is also labeled a terrorist. At one point it was an issue on the Korean internet (Kang 2007). A foreign scholar who was invited to give a lecture at one of the Korean universities called Kim Gu a "terrorist." He meant that a "terrorist" in this context was a person who committed himself to an armed independence movement. Yet, the Korean audience interpreted the word as one who killed innocent civilians. Although the word "terrorist" conveyed two different meanings, the application of the word to Kim Gu upset the Korean audience who had studied Korean history in Korea (Koehler 2007).

course taught in English.

Second, we can provide our graduate students with a chance to study in English-speaking universities by using the international student exchange programs that are currently centered around undergraduate students.

Third, we can increase the volume of translated texts in Korean history, both from English to Korean and Korean to English. The latter is probably more important. To do this, the first thing we will need to do is to train translators who specialize in Korean history. This task cannot be done at the level of individual scholars, and will be done most effectively with the government's support.

Fourth, we should acknowledge translating various forms of texts relevant to Korean history into English as a legitimate field of study, as has long been the case in Europe and the United States. This practice has enabled other countries to build a foundation for their own advancements of Asian studies. Although translating does not get the acknowledgement it deserves as a legitimate field of study in Korea, it really is difficult work—probably even more difficult than writing a thesis—to properly translate old texts or other historical materials and to add detailed references.

Fifth, we can try to recruit as many foreign students as possible to major in Korean history. There already are quite a few in the graduate program of the Academy of Korean studies, but other graduate programs need to follow suit.

It seems to be essential to nurture scholars who are knowledgeable about both Korean and Western versions of Korean history and who are able to teach Korean history in English from these two perspectives. Another important thing is to increase the number of Korean history textbooks which Korean academics write and translate (Lee 2008). Such textbooks convey Korean scholars' perspectives on Korean history. It is not only Korean students, but also foreign students who study abroad, who are able to learn the Korean version of Korean history by using textbooks produced by Korean academics. Even foreign professors who work for Korean universities can learn Korean ways of understanding Korean history and would therefore be able to introduce both Korean and Western versions of Korean history to their students.

Conclusion

We have tried to articulate the intimate relationship between the increase in English immersion education in Korean universities and the Korean government's globalization policy. Currently, English is the dominant language of the world. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, fluency in English has become a necessary condition for obtaining high social status in Korea. Universities too, cannot be free from the social demand for English education.

The number of college courses taught in English increased exponentially since a newspaper decided in 2006 to use percentages of core courses offered in English, along with the numbers of foreign professors and students, as a criterion in ranking universities. Korean history departments are no exceptions, and being able to lecture in English is often an important requirement for new hires these days. It is not necessary that every Korean history professor conducts lectures in English, but the demand for globalized universities that can offer courses taught in English has become a social force that cannot be ignored. One could even say that the globalization of Korean universities has been a success, judging from the fact that the number of foreign students in Korean universities is increasing faster than that of foreign professors. Most Korean history courses taught in English are currently being taught by native English-speakers because there still are not enough Korean scholars specializing in Korean history who can do so. The Korean history conceived of by these two groups differs greatly. In addition, teaching Korean history at the college level differs greatly from teaching national history in high schools. A Korean historian teaching a college course makes use of her own interpretations of history and historical information accumulated during her decades of study in order to help the next generation build their own critical conceptions of history. Therefore, we need to find various ways to ensure that there are enough Korean historians educated in Korea who are competent in teaching in English. In addition, we need to introduce Korean history to the world more actively by translating into English more data and research related to Korean history.

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the intimate relationship between increased English immersion education in Korean universities and the Korean government's globalization policy. University rankings led to an increase in the number of the foreign professors and foreign students. Korean history departments are no exceptions, and being able to lecture in English is often an important requirement for new hires and foreign professors is teaching in Korean history. We need to find various ways to ensure that there are enough Korean historians educated in Korea who are competent to teach in English. It seems to be essential to nurture scholars who are knowledgeable about both Korean and Western versions of Korean history and who are able to teach Korean history in English from these two perspectives. Additionally, it is important to increase the number of Korean history textbooks which Korean academics write and translate. Such textbooks convey Korean scholars' perspectives on Korean history. It is not only Korean students, but also foreign students who study abroad, who are able to learn the Korean version of Korean history by using textbooks produced by Korean academics.

Keywords: Globalization, English immersion education, Korean universities, Korean History, teaching in English