

■ 유럽에서의 한국학과 한국어교육

Korean as the gateway to Korean studies,  
The importance of area studies in a  
discipline-defined academic environment\*

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1. Introduction

It is rare in the day to day business of academic life to get a chance to stand back and reflect on the contours of one's academic activities. The conference on Korean Studies and Korean Language Education offered me such an occasion and I must admit I relished the opportunity.<sup>1)</sup>

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1) The 9th International Conference on Korean Language Education as a Foreign Language, organized by the Korean Language Education Research Institute on 27 October 2007.

For anyone involved in Korean Studies abroad, knowledge of Korean is a given. To know Korean is so obvious that it seems superfluous to reflect on the relationship between the Korean language and the field of Korean Studies. However, as we do not just conduct research, but also train future generations of Korean Studies' specialists, it is important to have a clear perception of how the language relates to the field.

Furthermore, at a time when at least at Leiden University, area studies are under pressure, it is all the more relevant to reflect on the centrality and subsidiarity of the Korean language in Korean Studies.

The question cannot only be whether there can be Korean studies without proper language skills; the add-on question then should be whether those skills define Korean studies. These are the questions I wish to raise in this contribution. First I will elaborate on the Korean Studies' program at Leiden University and how we seek to bridge the gap between the expectations from students and the infrastructural constraints we face. Next I look at research and elaborate on the concept of Korean Studies. I conclude by a discussion of the relationship between Korean and Korean Studies based upon my own research experience.

## 2. Korean and Korean Studies in Leiden

As far as the Korean Studies program at Leiden University is concerned, a major part of the teaching program consists of language classes. Korean language acquisition is time consuming and it remains a difficult balancing

act to bring our students to a adequate level of language capability while at the same time teaching them sufficient content courses and academic skills to merit the label of Korean Studies.

Although language acquisition is not the main aim of our program, it is still a fact that the knowledge of Korean is one of the important assets our graduates have when entering the job market. Now that we have gone through a major overhaul of the programs into a three-year BA and two-year MA program, it remains to be seen whether we can lift their language capability to a sufficient level in three years of BA to allow them to enter the job market.<sup>2)</sup>

Alongside the balancing act between language acquisition and content courses, there is another equally important balancing act within the language program between the different skills: reading, speaking & listening, and writing. From a purely academic point of view, and as a researcher/historian, I am inclined to stress the importance of reading skills. However, students come with the expectation of learning to speak. The market in turn does not even differentiate and takes it for granted that Korean language abilities cover all three skills.

So much for the expectations. What can we offer? Our entire program, BA and MA confounded, is run by merely three persons. One native speaker, Chi Myongsuk, MA in Dutch studies from Hankook University of Foreign Studies, is in charge of all conversation and writing classes. All

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2) Such an overhaul had become necessary to be in compliance with the Bologna Process, an initiative of the European Union to streamline the formal contours of academic programs throughout the European Union. See "The Bologna process: make higher education systems in Europe converge." (<http://europa.eu/scadplus/leg/en/cha/c11088.htm>).

grammar and reading classes are thought by either Prof. Walraven or myself. Among the two of us, we also cover all specifically Korea-related content courses. As textbooks, we use the *Integrated Korean* series published by Hawai'i University Press (2000) for all our language classes.<sup>3)</sup> On top of that, we use an 'in-house' developed grammar syllabus and a "Korean newspapers" syllabus introducing the most recurrent sentence patterns in newspaper-writing.

The switch from Lukoff's *Introductory Course in Korean* to the *Integrated Korean* textbooks happened partly in response to student complaints and partly in order to better integrate the different language classes. Students were not happy about the text-based teaching method of the Lukoff books, which was perceived as too theoretical and distant from daily life Korean language practices. They wanted more conversation-oriented and practice-based Korean language courses, which is what *Integrated Korean* offers. Despite the fact that these textbooks are very much geared towards spoken Korean, the fact that they allowed us to integrate the different aspects of the language teaching process (reading, speaking & listening, writing) allows us to bring our students to a reasonable overall language level quickly. Nevertheless there are limitations to what we can do. Some of the constraints we face are structural I already indicated the BA-MA structure, some are circumstantial: the Korean language structure is fundamentally different from Dutch, which makes learning Korean more difficult than learning a European language (except for Finnish or Bulgarian).

As far as active language skills are concerned, in an environment where

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3) Prior to using those manuals, we used Fred Lukoff's *An Introductory Course in Korean* (Yonsei University Press, 1993).

exposure to Korean media is restricted (though less so than before) and the chances to speak Korean actively is basically confined to the classroom, it goes without saying that the acquisition of a speaking ability is a slow moving process. As far as passive language skills reading ability is concerned, there is only so much a student can learn in a single week/month/year. As far as a vocabulary is concerned, the moment one works with texts outside the confines of the language textbooks, huge amounts of time are spent looking up words in a dictionary. On top of that, students are so much distracted should I say disoriented? by such new vocabulary that they often fail to see the structure of the sentences. Limited vocabulary makes it nigh impossible during their BA years to bring students to the level where they read a text rather than sentences. This is, however, the leap students at some point in their training will have to learn to make. There is a fundamental difference in deciphering sentences and reading texts. The sooner we can reach this point, the better for our students. This is a balancing act where I think the Korean Language Education Research Institute could be our partner in developing useful instruction tools and techniques.

Under the given circumstances, it very much seems to me that within the limitations of our program, there is not much more we can do in Leiden itself, although I have to admit that I cast jealous eyes at our colleagues in the Chinese and Japanese studies' department where the student numbers have permitted the recruitment of a "professionally trained" language staff under the supervision of a linguist. Indeed, except for Chi Myongsuk, neither prof. B.C.A. Walraven nor myself are "properly" trained to teach Korean language, nor is our research assignment dedicated to linguistics or Korean language education. On the contrary, our (in our eyes always) meager

research time is spent mostly on anything but language research. Although there is no doubt to our commitment to the program and its students, we are constantly torn between the devil and the deep. Not only does the university require us to produce contributions to the scientific debate in our respective disciplinary fields, we are also both passionate about our research areas. It is thus to our own dismay that we find ourselves having to constantly negotiate our available time between our passion (for research) and our duty (to our students). Although we are very conscientious in our teaching and we take our responsibilities towards our students and the requirements of the language programme very serious, it is my conviction that a team of duly-trained professional full-time language instructors might be able to further streamline and improve the program. Unfortunately, with the limited number of students we have, it is highly unlikely the university authorities will move into that direction any time soon.

Further improvement might also result from a differentiation within the Korean language program we offer. Although the limited number of students does not allow Leiden University to offer such a variety, it remains relevant to mention that a considerable number of our students come to us out of an interest in learning Korean, but without a specific academic interest. However, our program is an academic degree program in Korean studies rather than “just” a language program. Considered on a European level, it might be interesting to ponder the bifurcation of language programs over professional colleges, offering training to aspiring translators or interpreters, and universities where Korean language training is embedded in Korean studies programs. Certainly, we do not offer the very specific skills needed of a translator, let alone an interpreter. To my knowledge, only Bonn University offers such a

specialized program in Europe. If such a divergence of programs existed, we might be able to refocus our own language program to suit our academic needs better. In such a situation, the balance within the language program would tilt towards a greater emphasis on reading ability, because reading skills are of the utmost importance in academic work.<sup>4)</sup>

What is most important for the success of our language training program, is the balance between time spent in Korea and in Leiden. Though a stay in Korea is not compulsory for a BA student, in reality, most of our students at some stage in their study will spend time in (a language program) in Korea. The most important hurdle for making this come true is adequate funding. Ideally, time in Korea should be an integral and integrated part of the BA program in Korean Studies, but this can only be made compulsory if funding is available on a structural basis. For the moment, this is not the case in Leiden, though there are a number of institutions that cover some of the expenses incurred while studying abroad.

Although our students are willing to invest money in paying their way to Korea, study in Korea is very expensive when compared to Europe, where state funding keeps the threshold for entry into academic studies relatively low. Nevertheless, we now see that on average our students travel to Seoul

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4) I would even suggest that for those graduates in Korean studies who do not pursue an academic career the majority of graduates this is a valid argument. Take the business world as an example. Although for many businesses hiring a Korean studies graduate, the knowledge of Korean is often a determining factor in offering a contract, but in practice, such a graduate is more valuable for the cultural knowledge he/she brings to the job, rather than the specific language skills. International business today is conducted mostly in English anyway. Nevertheless, this hardly makes our graduates superfluous. On the contrary, time and again, they prove their worth as intercultural mediators.

on their own initiative during the summer of their first year of Korean studies. If they can afford it, they will enroll in a summer school, particularly one with a good language program component. Following their second BA year, we stimulate them to enroll for six months in a language program in Korea. Most of the time, we are able to secure them scholarships. In our new two-year MA program, we demand that our students spend an entire year in Korea further improving their language skills through enrolling in university language schools so that in their second year they have sufficient fluency to be able to read articles and even use primary source materials when preparing their MA thesis.<sup>5)</sup>

To make the most of their time spent in Korea, good cooperation agreements with specific language programs in Korea would help. Good coordination between what is on offer in Leiden and what would be thought in Korea could further streamline and increase the effectiveness of the language program we offer. In the absence of such specific coordination, it is important to acknowledge that the language programs in Korea focus specifically on practical language skills. This in itself complements well what we can offer in Leiden. Past experience tells us that our students make great strides while in Korea building on the basis that has been laid during their study at home.

From the Leiden perspective, and with the effectiveness of our language program in mind, I would like to see a good balance, interaction, and even cooperation between the Leiden language program and (specific) Korean universities. Currently, the main body of students taking language classes at

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5) Information on the MA in Korean Studies and MPhil in Asian Studies (specialization Korean Studies) can be found on the "Masters in Leiden" website: [www.mastersinleiden.nl](http://www.mastersinleiden.nl).



Korean universities is extremely diverse. Among them, the number of Korean Studies majors is insignificant. On top of that, there is within Korea a growing (non-academic) social need for Korean language classes among inbound migrants (whether laborers or settlers). It goes without saying that these groups should be served first.<sup>6)</sup> Be that as it may, an institution like Korea Foundation which already offers many Korean language acquisition fellowships to Korean Studies students might be interested at some point to invest in the establishment of an institute specifically geared towards accommodating this particular group of students. Dreaming aloud, one possible and potentially very fruitful option might be a joint initiative by the Kyujanggak library and the Korean Language Education Research Center both at Seoul National University. The advantage of such a cooperation would be the ability to create a Korean Studies Korean Language Institute offering not just courses in vernacular Korean, but also classical Korean and *hanmun* classes for those students with an interest pre-modern and early modern Korea. The Kyujanggak library might further offer seminars in reading Korean source materials, something that might particularly appeal to those students thinking of moving into PhD programs. Certainly, the need for such specific training among Korean Studies majors will increase in the future as Korean studies programs are forced to streamline their courses into ever tighter schedules and pressured into market-oriented frameworks.

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6) See Yun Huiwon's stimulating contribution to the workshop on Korean Language Education: 윤희원(2007), "비한국학 분야의 한국어교육" in 제9회 한국어교육 국제학술회의 한국학과 한국어교육, pp.33-49.

### 3. Korean Studies as Area Studies

Korean studies abroad has a different connotation to Korean studies within Korea. As Chon Sangin in his contribution made clear, Korean studies in Korea read like an ideological tool in the service of an essentialized understanding of the Korean nation, whereas abroad, Korean studies belong to the field of “area studies.”<sup>7)</sup> This is also the case in Leiden, where the Korean language acquisition program discussed above is part and parcel of an academic degree program in Korean Studies. As part of the Faculty of Letters, Korean studies used to be very much a traditional Korean language and culture program, but area studies have evolved to encompass also social science approaches. It remains, however, a fact that we deal mainly in what in business circles is known as “soft knowledge.”<sup>8)</sup>

Area studies have been singled out for very severe criticism from mono-disciplinary circles, partly because of this “soft knowledge.” One of the most often heard criticisms is that area studies have no methodology, a critique also often hurled at history. Being a historian myself, I stand doubly accused. I would remonstrate however that particularly mono-disciplinary approaches tend to be reductive, incapable of doing justice to the complexity

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7) See Chon Sangin's appreciated contribution to the workshop on Korean Language Education: 전상인(2007), “한국학, 한국어, 한국어교육” in 제9호 한국어교육 국제학술회의 한국학과 한국어교육, pp.23-32.

8) “Soft knowledge” is a rather derogatory description for unquantifiable insights gleaned from cultural analysis as opposed to the allegedly “hard knowledge” that economists and social scientists squeeze out of statistical data. For a thorough critique of the obsession with quantification in the social sciences, see John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History. How historians map the past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

of the realities that are being analyzed.<sup>9)</sup>

Area studies also stand accused of orientalism. Certainly, area studies have a history of close links with imperialism. Area specialists were often drafted in the service of the colonial project, either as administrators in the colonial system or as spokesmen for the colonial project. As a discipline, it was more informed by cultural prejudice than by any critical faculty. By origin, area studies tended to focus on philological studies. Often decried as devoid of theory, in fact, philological studies are very methodical. What was originally missing, though was a self-critical attitude. In that sense, the attack of orientalism certainly holds true. Nevertheless, a too sweeping attack on philological studies is unfounded. There is nothing inherently wrong with *sound* philological research. Today, sound philology is informed by literary theory. Now, as ever, there is a continuing need for sensible and sensitive translations. Philological expertise is needed to produce proper translations that do justice to the text and the culture the text stems from. What is more, without proper philological “legwork” a lot of mono-disciplinarians without the proper language skills would be devoid of the raw material they rely on to produce their theoretically informed (and biased) universalistic insights.

Though the critique of orientalism may have held true in the past, it is equally true that the remnants of orientalism today are to be found not

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9) Along with Remco Breuker, I pleaded the cause of area studies in Remco E. Breuker & Koen De Ceuster, “Introduction: The area in the middle or the globalization of eccentricity” in Remco E. Breuker, ed. *Korea in the Middle. Korean Studies and Area Studies*(Leiden: CNWS Publications, 2007), pp.1-18. The following paragraphs are developed in more detail there.

among soul searching area studies specialists, but among mono-disciplinarians who through the application of their allegedly universal theories impose a culturally biased reading on a sanitized reality. Proper area studies today hold up a mirror to the universal theories of the social sciences by showing that all the area specific information that is discarded as irrelevant, in fact, potentially undermines the universal applicability of the theory. Area studies can rebuke universalistic theories by asking why it is that “the West” does not qualify as just another “area”! Even when one accepts that imperialism spread ideas and concepts worldwide, it is sheer hubris to suggest that such ideas arrived in virgin territory. The introduction phase is inevitably followed by a phase of “indigenization” where the “local” adapts the “universal.” As a historian, I would further add that not only the local is pushed aside, but also the temporal dimension. All too often, grand universalistic theories make abstraction of historical variations, as I will indicate in the third section.

I have come to understand area studies as a fluid body of scholars studying a single area from various different perspectives and disciplinary backgrounds in an attempt to reach a more comprehensive understanding of the various dynamics at work within the region studied. Rather than the objectifying position of power based on a single universal theory backed up by (geo-) political power, a proper 21st Century (post-colonial) area studies scholar is fully aware of the value-ridden gaze he/she casts on the area under scrutiny.<sup>10)</sup> Rather than to impose a reading from the outside, what

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10) Chon Sangin (p.24 nt.3) raises the specter of area studies laying claim to objective knowledge and the cloud of imperialism this casts. However, today, universal objectivity is only claimed by political or social scientists who operate from the insular safety of their theory. The curse of orientalism today is to be found in the works of

one tries to achieve is a shift in subject-position in order to understand reality from within the region, from within the cultural and historical dynamics of the region.

In its ever shifting fluidity, area studies offer a space where scholars can meet over the boundaries of various disciplines, driven by a hunger for understanding, not curtailed by some dogmatic allegiance to one specific theory that pretends to have the ultimate answer, but where different theories are mobilized to create a multi-layered understanding, whereby the scholar's gaze is permanently questioned and bracketed. More than anything else, area studies is an attitude; the acceptance that all knowledge is relative, informed by the historicity of the scholar and the method one employs to make the data speak. The strength of an argument then does not stem from theoretical stubbornness and rigidity, but from the open dialogue between various theories and approaches which meet on the level plain that area studies offer.

While universities pay lip service to multidisciplinary research, in their organization such research is difficult to accommodate. Only area studies offer an institutional shelter for true multidisciplinary. As a loosely delineated field with ever receding boundaries, a scholar is free to wonder, as his/her interests demands, picking up along the way theories and methodologies as instruments helping to dissect the specific question that drives the research. Interdisciplinarity is born from wondering in such an open field. In Leiden, the Research School of Asian, African and Amerindian Studies (CNWS)<sup>11)</sup> offers such a shelter and platform, where history,

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political scientists, rather than in the work of true area studies scholars.

11) <http://www.cnws.leidenuniv.nl/>

anthropology, sociology, political science, law, philology and literary sciences meet and exchange insights leading to a rich texture of understanding that is not exclusive and rigid, but open and flexible. Another forum is AKSE, the Association for Korean Studies in Europe.<sup>12)</sup> Bringing together scholars working from different disciplines on Korea, AKSE conferences and workshops are by definition events where various disciplines come together, intermingle, and cross-fertilize each other, leading to results that are richer in depth and texture than any single discipline can bring.

Area Studies has evolved from the bookish scholar in his attic stubbornly peering over a handful of old books trying to make sense of hardly legible scripts to a discipline where we are in close contact with the local scholars and their findings. In the old 'orientalist' days, Western scholars imposed their reading, ignorant of the local expertise or insights often in denial of the existence of any such expertise nowadays, we define our role as bringing this local perspective. We try to pierce the Korean perspective and break the parochial Eurocentric mould of looking at ourselves and the world. We put Korea in the center, well aware that it is Koreans who speak for themselves. We are there to mediate the Korean perspective and thereby offer our own culture and society an opportunity to reflect on itself.

Language is the threshold that one has to pass to enter this fluid domain of area studies. Only knowledge of the local language allows one to pierce the multilayered complexity of historical and cultural residue upon which any society is built.

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12) <http://www.akse.uni-kiel.de/>

#### 4. Korean and Korean Studies, a Personal Assessment

In this final part, I will give a very personal account of how I see the relationship between Korean and Korean studies. As a historian, I broadly define my research as studies in the introduction and dissemination of modern nationalism in Korea. On closer scrutiny, it is clear that my research develops in synchrony with developments within Korean historiography itself, though from a certain distance. At the same time, I am influenced by theoretical debates within the humanities. In my PhD dissertation I analyzed the diaries of Yun Ch'ihō in an attempt to understand the apparently contradictory labels attached by Korean historians to this historical figure: he was either described as a nationalist or as a collaborator.<sup>13)</sup> I reached the conclusion that such a dichotomous approach was highly reductionist, looking exclusively at him from a political perspective. It proved the wrong question if the aim was to do justice to the complexity of this historical figure. However, as I developed in an article on the historiography of collaboration in Korea, this juxtaposition of nationalism and collaboration reflected the state of the field of Korean historiography at the time.<sup>14)</sup> In that article I was particularly interested in the social relevance of the collaboration issue in the struggle for democracy and how this influenced the way collaboration was dealt with by historians.

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13) Koen De Ceuster, *From Modernization to Collaboration, the Dilemma of Korean Cultural Nationalism: the Case of Yun Ch'i-ho (1865-1945)*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium, 1994.

14) Koen De Ceuster, "The Nation Exorcised: The Historiography of Collaboration in South Korea" in *Korean Studies* 25:2 (2001), pp.207-242.

My interest in Korean historiography is partly informed by the awareness that history is a fundamental part of the make-up of any nation, and a nation is in constant flux, in a constant state of “nation building.” Developments in Korean national historiography can tell us something about the state of the Korean nation. So, when I was asked to take part in an international conference on “Contesting Views on a Common Past: Revisions of History in East Asia” in Leipzig in June 2006, I gladly accepted the invitation.<sup>15)</sup> To my great dismay, the debates were so focused on the textbook controversy in East Asia that the contentious nature of national history within the respective states of East Asia was largely overlooked. While attending that conference, I could not help noting that when looking at East Asia from the outside, one only notices the state discourses on history, but is oblivious to the vibrant debates within the respective societies. In my contribution to the edited volume to appear next spring, I specifically look at the relationship between the competing discourses on national history and the deepening of Korean democracy in order to show that there is not a single dominant discourse on Korean history in Korea, but only a constant debate between evolving discourses.<sup>16)</sup> I came away from that conference with an understanding of the task of an area specialist: when the danger of essentialization looms, it is our task to deconstruct such essentializations and establish the fundamental complexity and diversity of the underlying realities. It goes without saying that only a proper command of the Korean language

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15) See [http://www.uni-leipzig.de/~oarev/download/programm\\_homepage.pdf](http://www.uni-leipzig.de/~oarev/download/programm_homepage.pdf)

16) Koen De Ceuster “When History Matters: Reconstructing South Korea’s National Memory in the Age of Democracy” in Steffi Richter, editor, *Contested Views of a Common Past: Revisions of History in Contemporary East Asia* Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, forthcoming (spring 2008).



allows me to do this kind of research. Knowledge of Korean provided me unhindered and direct access to the chaotic multitude of voices in Korean society. Only a proper appreciation of public discourses allowed me to come to present an adequate insight in the complexity of the historiographical debates going on in Korea.

But knowledge of the language is not sufficient. Language is crucial, but at the same time nothing but an instrument. The old oriental studies' tradition also mastered the language, probably even more thoroughly than I do, but what was lacking was critical reflection on the position and power of the scholar as subject making utterances about others. More than just language, we have to bring a critical awareness of our own historicity to the field, a constant questioning of our own position in the field. As an anecdote, I sometimes relate to my students how I went through different phases when I studied in Korea. The first year, everything was fascinating, new, "exotic." What I was doing was "othering" Korea making it fundamentally different, the opposite of what I was. The next phase, year two, I had unlocked the mystery; I was convinced I knew it all. I was ready and happy to make "objective" and "authoritative" judgments, not hindered by any self-reflection. Only in my third year did I wake up to the fact that I knew nothing. Suddenly I was thrown into doubt. All that had seemed so clear the year before, now seemed less obvious, more complicated. Finally, I started to look at myself, questioning my own position and its historicity. Only after that experience did I acquire the necessary self-criticism to spend a fourth year in Korea at ease and comfortable with myself and what I was doing. Rather than making (value) judgments, I had moved to the point where I was trying to understand what was going on, not by imposing my reading,

but by trying to understand the dynamics at work in the local context while critically questioning my own gaze. What I learned in the process was a sensitivity to my own cultural reading of reality, the fact that I am embedded permanently in a cultural framework that determines the categories I use in analyzing the reality I encounter. The point is not to try to peel away that framework, but to be aware of its existence and take it into account when making statements.

Without knowledge of Korean, I would be burdened qualitatively and quantitatively by an additional layer of interpretation: the dependence on foreign language materials on Korea. In an odd way, I am myself a producer of such materials, to be blamed for adding to the burden of others, so to speak. However, by increasing the quantity of available material, the qualitative burden may lessen through the availability of a wider variety of viewpoints.

However, another example from my own research will show that language skills by themselves do not make the difference. Last year I was approached by prof. Ch'oi Toksu to contribute a paper to a conference on the Second Hague Peace Conference.<sup>17)</sup> At first, I was not too enthusiastic about this, because I never thought much merit in revisiting the martyrdom of Yi Chun. However, after taking on the project, and following a superficial look at the available research, I thought there was still a lot of uncovered ground. Noticing that most Korean research had focused on a nearly exclusive Korean perspective, interpreting the mission as part of the national struggle to regain national sovereignty, I opted to look at the mission from the perspective of the conference, asking how this odd group of uninvited

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17) "1907년 헤이그평화회의와 대한제국, 그리고 열강" 고려대학교, 2007년 6월 15일.

Koreans was greeted in The Hague, both by diplomats, peace activists and the press. This approach allowed me to conclude that rather than a failure, the mission should be considered a measured success in so far as it proved how the Korean court engaged the international community as a fellow nation state entitled to equal treatment under the system of sovereign equality. I particularly stressed the need to look beyond the horizon of the 1905 Protectorate Treaty to the continuity in Kojong's efforts to realize an international neutralization of Korea. That this attempt failed was not so much a matter of misunderstanding on the part of the Korean court, but rather a consequence of the inequality engrained in the world order of Great Power dominance which reduced Korea to a second tier state. In this context, it was fascinating to see how the Korean delegation developed a very adequate media policy, constantly adjusting its message as events evolved, positioning itself in such a way that at least public opinion was swayed by its message.<sup>18)</sup>

Though this research started from taking stock of Korean historiographical research on the Hague Mission, primary research was mainly based on Western language archives, diaries, letters, newspaper clippings and diplomatic dispatches. Some of these materials had previously been partially analyzed by staff of the Dutch national archives and the Hague city archives. However, lacking familiarity with the specifics of Korean history, they either framed the

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18) Koen De Ceuster, "Success and Failure of the Korean Delegation to the at the Second Hague Peace Conference" (to be published in Korean). An earlier, very preliminary draft of this paper is reproduced as "The Dutch Government and Media Reaction to the Korean Mission to the 1907 Hague Peace Conference" in 민족문화연구원 창설 50주년 기념 국제학술회의 자료집 1907년 헤이그평화회의와 대한제국, 그리고 열강, pp. 55-64.

information inadequately, or, in other cases, failed to see the relevance of some documents. Only a proper contextualization of the documents allowed their relevance for Korean history to be revealed. Lacking a sensitivity for either the Korean subject position or the power dynamics at work in the conference, they could not present their findings in such a way that their historical significance was exposed. My own familiarity with Korean history and historiography allowed me to dig deeper into the archives and sources, offering a rereading of some previously produced documents, thus producing a story that frames the mission from multiple angles establishing its historical importance not only in light of Korea's struggle for national survival, but also from the perspective of big power politics and the social dynamics of international politics. So, although the primary research for this paper was not based on Korean language materials, it is clear that a Koreanist was needed to unlock the information hidden in the archives.

Let me finally introduce an altogether different project that began as a non-academic venture but is gradually invading my research agenda. By chance I was brought into contact with a collection of North Korean art. I was asked to provide background information to an exhibition of North Korean posters and socialist realist oil paintings hosted in Rotterdam in the summer of 2004.<sup>19)</sup>

Shortly thereafter I had a chance to go to Pyongyang with a Belgian crew to discuss a documentary movie project. After ample discussions and consultation, we agreed to work on a documentary about North Korean

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19) See <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,501040719-662827,00.html> for a review article on the exhibition. The collection is available online: <http://northkoreanart.com/index.html>

*Chosonhwa* painters. In September 2005 we returned to Pyongyang and met a number of artists and had long conversations with them. This first hand experience of North Korea, its art and artists triggered an ongoing quest for a proper understanding and presentation of North Korean art abroad. Already during my first visit, I had noticed that “our” categories do not apply in the North. Working my way through the literature on “totalitarian” art,<sup>20)</sup> I was struck by the inadequacy of the existing research. It did hardly more than establish that art produced in totalitarian states did not properly qualify as art. Although it is certainly correct to state that the art produced in totalitarian states had severed all ties with Western art traditions, to suggest that totalitarianism inevitably leads to the end of history of art (to paraphrase Francis Fukuyama) smacks of ideological wishful thinking reminiscent of the cold war. It suggests that only art building on the Western European art tradition is proper art. My experience on the ground in North Korea suggests otherwise. Though it is correct to claim that North Korea reinvented art and started with a (nearly) clean slate, it is equally true that once that start was taken, a new tradition developed within the ordained styles, making it an interesting subject for art historical research.

The only book to date on North Korean art in a Western language is Jane Portal's *Art under Control in North Korea* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005). Unfortunately, the book fails to capture the unique character of the North Korean experience, reducing North Korean art to something akin to a replica of Soviet Russian and by extension totalitarian art.<sup>21)</sup> What I missed

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20) Igor Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People's Republic of China* (London: Collins Harvill, 1990) is probably the most cited work in this regard.

in her book is a proper acknowledgement of the specifically Korean in North Korean art. Caught under the banner “socialist realism,” North Korean art by definition always seems to refer to anything but Korean art, amounting to a tendency to deny North Korea any agency and subjecthood. As for South Korean scholarship, it is by and large caught up in an ideological analysis of North Korean art, informed by the reading of the leading North Korean publication on art: *Choson Yesul*.<sup>22)</sup> The absence of direct contact with North Korean artists results in an utter inability to grasp the practice of art there.<sup>23)</sup> Unable to pierce the ideological phraseology of North Korean art critique, the reality the North Korean artist faces remains opaque. So all in all, most available studies on North Korean art bump into the ideological cloak draped over the practice of art, failing to grasp the reality underneath it. As an area studies scholar, I notice that on all sides we are staring at North Korea with an uncritical gaze, self-content and secure in our own values, but incapable of grasping the meaning of art in North Korea. In an attempt to overcome these shortcomings, I follow two strategies. On the one hand, I have read through Kim Jong Il’s “Treatise on Art,” the main theoretical text on art in North Korea today,<sup>24)</sup> and I am collecting a number of other North Korean publications on art and aesthetics. Familiarity with

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21) See my review of Jane Portal’s *Art under Control in North Korea in the Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies*, 5:2 (October 2005), pp.247-251.

22) A good example of this ideological reading of North Korean art, is 이구열, *작품으로 만나는 주체미술 북한 미술 50년* (돌베개, 2001), a book Jane Portal heavily relied upon.

23) 박계리, “조선화의 변화와 김정일주의의 미술론” in 북한연구학회 편, *북한의 방송인론과 예술* (경인문화사, 2006: pp.225-251) on the contrary has an unusually sharp insight in North Korean art history.

24) 김정일, *미술론* (평양 조선로동당출판사, 1992).

such publications allows me to grasp the theoretical framework North Korean artists work from. It also informs me about the role and position of art and artists in North Korean society. On the other hand, I embarked on an analysis of the concepts of art I have grown up with, convinced as I am that only a proper problematization of my own concepts will allow me to really pierce the cognitive barrier that divides these two distinct art worlds. In order to achieve such a problematization, I turned to the sociology of art and in particular such studies that establish the specific historical circumstances related to the appearance of the modern concept of art and the social origins of the modern concept of the artist.<sup>25)</sup> Only by approaching North Korean art and artists from such an angle can I begin to grasp and empathize with the North Korean artist and understand North Korean art in its proper context. In turn, such understanding will allow me to mediate my insights to an audience unfamiliar with the specificity of North Korea. As is clear from the above, my encounter with North Korean artists has spurred an academic interest. On the one hand, I am working towards a publication on the practice of art in North Korea, where I hope to show how there is room in North Korea for artists to establish themselves and their art within the constraints the system. On the other hand, I am considering a research project looking at the appearance of the social concept of the modern artist in colonial Korea. This has been done for a number of high profile artists

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25) I find the work of Nathalie Heinich (*Du peintre à l'artiste. Artisans et académiciens à l'âge classique* [Paris: les Editions de Minuit, 1993] and *L'élite artiste. Excellence et singularité en régime démocratique* [Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2005]) very stimulating. The same goes for Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art. A Cultural History* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

taking up oil painting. What I would be particularly interested in, is to see how these concepts also influenced “traditional painting” circles in terms of training, organization, social profile etc.

The lesson I learn from my musings about North Korean art is that a willingness to critically engage one’s own position is crucial in finding a workable solution to what the international community likes to describe as the “North Korean problem.” As long as we apply our own categories, without acknowledging that within North Korea a different dynamic is at work, we will only be baffled by this “exotic” country. Shifting one’s observer’s position from the outside to the inside, one cannot but come to a fundamentally different conclusion, and exclaim with Hwang Sogyong: “There are truly people living there!” I find that in the many interviews I give about North Korea and inter-Korean affairs, I spend most of the time deconstructing the questions, analyzing why the questions are inherently biased, suggestive and often plainly wrong. Such an approach does not make North Korea a better place, but at least it may help in bringing an understanding of the North Korean position closer. That is why area studies are so important. Different though North Korea may be, it is not incomprehensible for someone willing to look at it from the inside.

The same goes for art historians dealing with North Korea. Looking at North Korean art from the perspective of classical art history, it may not fit within the established genealogies and hierarchies. Given that North Korea has a proper art theory and produces works of art, trying to understand the practice of art in North Korea from the inside out, will not only provide useful insights in North Korea itself, but at the same time allow a critical reflection of the methodology of standard art history.



## 5. In Conclusion

In this essay I surveyed from a very personal perspective the relationship between Korean language education and Korean studies, both in regard to the Leiden University degree program in Korean Studies, as well as in terms of an area studies research field. In a humanities' context, Korean studies in Leiden deals in what some like to describe as "soft knowledge." Although in the everyday research practice of a Korean studies scholar, the target audience may well be one's Korean colleagues, the social role of a Korean studies scholar consists of mediating the area in all its diversity to the home audience. Such mediation is all about communication and language is an essential tool in making communication possible. Such communication works in two directions: communication of the researcher with the region under scrutiny and here a Korean language ability is crucial and communication between the researcher and the home audience, where a critical dialogue with one's own culture is of the essence. Rather than dogmatic rigor and theoretical stubbornness, an area studies specialist is first and foremost informed by the reality he confronts. Theory helps to read the complex reality encountered, but an open mind is kept at all times to forego the imposition of theoretical rigidity on a recalcitrant reality. More than anything else, an area specialist needs to be doted with a fundamental openness for difference, and an eagerness for dialogue, both in words and in attitude.\*

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■ Abstract

Korean as the gateway to Korean studies,  
The importance of area studies in a discipline-defined  
academic environment

Koen De Ceuster

For a Korean Studies scholar, the relationship between Korean and Korean studies is so self-evident that it is hardly ever problematized. In this essay, I take the opportunity to elaborate on this relationship on the basis of my very personal experiences as a lecturer and a researcher at Leiden University in the Netherlands.

The relationship between Korean studies and Korean language acquisition is fundamental in the teaching program of our department. To a Korean studies specialist, Korean is an essential tool: essential, but a tool rather than the essence. However, the difficulty to a Dutch native speaker is such that a lot of time is allotted to learning Korean. To find the right balance between academic content courses and language acquisition is a constant worry. Furthermore, both students and the market focus mostly on spoken Korean, whereas from an academic point of view, reading skills are probably of more direct relevance. On top of these varied expectations, there are inevitable structural and institutional constraints which limit the level of Korean our students can reach. Within that context, I suggest that a good ideally structural cooperation between language acquisition at our department and language programs in Korea could improve the efficiency of the language learning process.

In a second part, I elaborate on the merits of area studies as a fluid zone where scholars meet in the spirit of true interdisciplinarity, over the dogmatic boundaries

of single disciplines to come to a multifaceted understanding of a region-specific reality. The suggestion that the knowledge thus acquired is hardly more than “local” knowledge is a fundamentally “orientalist” bias produced by mono-disciplinary scholars who claim universal applicability of theories grounded in more often than not “Western” case studies, as if the West were not just another “area.” Area studies are a challenge to theory-based mono-disciplinary approaches, because they do not discard the local variables as irrelevant, but consider them a potentially fundamental correction to the abstraction of universal applicability. How language capability is crucial in accessing the complexity of an area-specific reality is addressed in the third part where I elaborate on how knowledge of Korean is a fundamental tool in my own research. I specifically mention how a direct broad and deep access to the field of Korean historiography allows me to see the multiple discourses on national history that coexist at any given time. This insight provided essential background information to critically assess the essentialist reduction to single national historical discourses during a recent debate on historical revisionism in East Asia. However, more than just language, a direct familiarity with the region and its culture and history is crucial to reach an informed judgment on a specific issue. Take North Korean art: often presented as nothing but socialist realism, this interpretation frames North Korean art as anything but Korean. This is an appreciation devoid of any understanding of the art practice in North Korea itself. My experience in North Korea has given me sufficient awareness to critically reflect on the concepts and criteria used by outside observers who apply categories that are more telling about the observer than the observed. Rather than imposing a Eurocentric reading, a proper area specialist tries to read the reality from within the local context. Piercing the local perspective and mediating this to the home audience is the task of a 21st Century area studies scholar. Communication is at the heart of what an area specialist does. Language is at the heart of communication.

[Key Words] Korean studies, Korean language acquisition, Area studies

## ■ 국문초록

### 한국학의 관문으로서의 한국어

- 대학의 교육환경 면에서 본 지역학의 중요성

쿤 드 퀘스터

한국을 연구하는 학자에게 한국어와 한국학의 관련성은 너무도 자명해서 이제껏 문제시된 적이 없었다. 그 등한시되어 온 관계성에 대해 필자는 지난 수년간 네덜란드 라이덴 대학 교수로서 그리고 한국학 연구자로서의 개인적인 경험들을 바탕으로 면밀한 검토를 시도해 보고자 한다.

현재 라이덴 대학 한국학과 강의계획안을 보게 되면 한국어 습득은 한국학을 공부하는 학생들에게 필수사항으로 제시되어 있다. 한국학 전문가에게도 한국어는 필수불가결한 학문적 도구이다. “필수불가결”이지만, 그것은 어디까지나 언어적 도구이지 그 자체로 목적이 될 수는 없다. 네덜란드어를 모국어로 사용하는 이들이 한국어를 배우는 데는 많은 시간을 할애해야 하는 힘겨움이 뒤따른다. 그 같은 언어 수업과 학문적 내용을 위주로 한 강의들 사이의 균형을 맞추는 일도 쉽지 않은 일이다. 나아가 학생들과 수요 시장 측에서는 한국어 회화에 대한 요구가 많고, 학문적 활동 면에서는 한국어 독해 능력이 더 필요성을 인정받고 있다. 기대치의 격차와 더불어 구조적, 제도적 교육의 한계까지 겹쳐서 학생들이 도달할 수 있는 한국어 습득 능력이란 일정 수준으로 한정될 수밖에 없다. 이러한 상황 속에서 현재 본 대학의 한국학과는 이상적인 제도적 방안의 하나로 한국 대학들과의 협력을 통해 한국 내의 한국어 집중 과정을 학생들에게 이수시킴으로써 언어교육의 향상과 능률을 꾀하고 있다.

이 논문의 두 번째 논지는 지역학의 가치와 역할에 관한 문제이다. 지역학은 진정한 학제 간의 연구 정신을 가진 학자들이 만나, 자신들이 몸담고 있는 학문의 독단과 경계를 넘어, 특정지역의 현실에 대한 다각적인 이해를 이끌어 낼 수 있는 유동적 학문 영역으로 떠오르고 있다. 어떤 한 지역에 대한 지식이 특정 지

역의 정보 이상 될 수 없다는 기존 인식은 근본적으로 “오리엔탈리즘적” 편견과 선입견의 산물이다. 그런 인식을 만들어낸 학자들이 한사코 주장하는 보편적 이론의 적용이란 것도 사실은 “서구”라는 특정 지역에 기반하여 도출된 것이다. 그럼에도 불구하고 여기서의 “서구”는 마치 “지역”이 아닌 것처럼 그 이상의 의미처럼 받아들여지고 있다. 이런 상황에서 지역학 연구는 이론 중심의 단일 학문적 접근 방법에 대한 도전이 될 수 있다. 이제껏 지역적인 가변 요소들이 관련성 희박이라는 이유로 소홀히 되었다면, 지역학에서는 그 요소들을 추상적 이론 적용의 단점을 근본적으로 수정할 수 있는 훌륭한 가능성으로 받아들이고 있다.

지역학에서 이어지는 필자의 세 번째 논지는 한 특수한 지역의 다양하고 복잡한 현실에 접근하기 위해서 절실히 요구되는 해당 지역의 언어에 대한 능력이다. 여기서는 필자 자신의 연구 활동을 그 예로 들었다. 필자는 한국 역사학이라는 분야에 보다 직접적으로, 심층적으로 파고들면서, 어느 시대에나 공존하던 민족 역사라는 것에 대한 다양한 담론을 엿볼 수 있었다. 그로부터 얻어진 시각은 동아시아의 역사 수정주의(historical revisionism)에 대한 최근 논쟁, 특히 본질주의적(essentialist) 입장에서 단순화시켜 버린 단일 민족주의 역사관을 비판적으로 바라볼 수 있는 중요한 배경지식이 되어 주었다. 비단 언어뿐만 아니라 그 사회의 문화와 역사에 대한 깊은 조에는 특수한 이슈에 관련해 치우치지 않은 견해를 마련해 주었다. 예로 북한의 예술은 곧잘 사회주의적 리얼리즘의 소산이라는 틀로 평가 해석되곤 한다. 이러한 평가에는 북한 내의 예술작업이 실제 어떠한가에 대한 이해가 결여되어 있다. 필자는 북한에서의 견문을 통해 외부 관찰자가 북한 예술을 감상하며 사용하는 개념들과 비평의 잣대가 얼마나 주관적인가를 비판적으로 숙고해 볼 수 있었다. 놀랍게도 그들은 북한예술을 말하며, 작품 자체가 아닌 그들 자신의 생각에 대해 더 많이 떠들어댄다. 지역연구학자들은 유럽 중심주의적인 눈으로 바라보기 이전에 현실을 그 지역적 맥락에서 읽고자 노력한다. 지역 입장을 반영한 시각을 찾아내서 그것을 자신들 사회의 대중과 매개시키는 것은 21세기 지역학 학자의 임무일 것이다. 그러한 의사소통의 커뮤니케이션이 지역학자의 근저에 있다면, 그 의사소통의 근저에는 바로 언어가 있다.

[번역: 이정심]

[주제어] 한국학, 한국어 습득, 지역학