

Korean Studies in America: Formative Years, 1964-1967:

Birth of the Committee on Korean Studies, Association for Asian Studies

A Brief History: Part I

© Hesung Chun Koh*

This past year, the 70th anniversary meeting of the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) in Hawaii brought back a flood of special memories. Some of the most memorable were those from our very first days, when we struggled to establish Korean studies by establishing a Committee on Korean studies at the AAS. Although some of our dear colleagues are no longer with us today, a few of them have stayed with us fortunately and are now enjoying their retirement in Hawaii. I was excited by the thought of reuniting with them.

As for those warm memories of CKS' earlier days at the AAS annual meeting in the 1960s, they were also still vivid in my memory... Over thirty Koreanists gathered in a circle for an informal evening meeting, which was friendly and exciting. The participants had the opportunity to share their recent research news, encourage each other, and build some lasting professional and personal relationships. This was even before NEAC or any other regional council was established, and we were not aware of any similar gathering of scholars working on China or Japan at that time.

.....
"Mal to andoemnida. CKS rul opsegettagoyo?!"

That can't be true - they are going to close down CKS?

"Kuge ottok'e aessoso toenil inteyo."

Do they even know how much effort went into establishing it [CKS]?

These were some of our gut reactions the night before the Hawaii CKS general meeting of Koreanists, when one of the CKS committee members told us about the possibility of CKS to disband the Committee.

A discussion ensued on why CKS/AAS needed to continue. One of our members argued that, as the original supporters of Korean Studies since the previous era, we must make sure to attend the meeting and prevent the termination of CKS. In fact it was that morning, some of us who were part of this group took pleasure in reminiscing about our gatherings in the earlier days, and one suggested why not hold an international conference to celebrate in the near future. It was a lovely brunch meeting at a luxurious beachfront hotel restaurant that my friends hosted a welcome gathering for me.

I am particularly happy to hear that the new leaders and board members of CKS are now actively revitalizing the field of Korean studies through the use of their new website. I am very pleased to share some memories of the development of Korean studies in the early years and of the initiation of CKS at the AAS at the invitation of CKS chair, Professor Hwasook Nam.

One day early in 1964, that is 48 years ago, I received a telephone call from Arthur Wright, Professor of Chinese History at Yale University and then-incumbent President of the AAS. This was in my second year of teaching a seminar on East Asian Law and Society at Yale Law School with Kwang Lim Koh. I was concurrently a fulltime researcher at both the Yale Sociology Department and the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF), a cross-cultural research organization. Meanwhile, my husband Kwang Lim Koh was an international lawyer and political scientist (he was the first South Korean diplomat to represent the Chang Myon government at the Korean Embassy in Washington D.C. and the United Nations in

New York before the military coup of Park Chung Hee.)

Arthur Wright said, "Hesung, I think you will be the right person to help solve the difficult problem that the AAS is facing.... You know there are two different groups trying to organize the scholars working on Korean studies. But unless they are united there is little chance for either group to succeed. Would you talk to them that I am sympathetic to their cause but they have to unite." As I listened to what Professor Wright is asking me to do and also to learn the names of these Koreanists that Professor Wright mentioned, I realized that I knew all of them and felt comfortable with undertaking the assignment. For the sake of time, I am sending you a copy of my earlier article appearing in *Korean and Korean American Studies Bulletin*, vol.1,no.1: 3-5, 1984 of which I am also the editor.

■. 1964-1967

On April 27, 1964, Professor William Henthorn of the Department of Asian and Pacific Languages at the University of Hawaii issued a letter inviting other leaders in Korean Studies to join with him in forming an independent Association for Korean Studies. In conjunction with Professor Henthorn's letter, Professor Ernest A. Jackson, Chairman of the Department of European Languages at the University of Hawaii, sought the nomination of one chairperson and five others to serve on a committee for such a Korean Studies Association.

A month later, the following four scholars wrote to Yale professor Arthur Wright, who was the incumbent President of the Association for Asian Studies: C. I. Eugene Kim, Assistant Professor of Political Science and Director of Korean Research and Publications at Western Michigan University; Mr. Key P. Yang, Head of the Korean Section at the Library of Congress; Glenn D. Paige, Assistant Professor of Politics at Princeton University; and Chong-Sik Lee, Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Pennsylvania. They jointly proposed that: (1) a panel on Korean Studies be included in the 1965 the AAS annual meeting; (2) Dr. William Henthorn be requested by the AAS to organize this panel; and (3) a "smoker" on "Korean Studies Resources and Needs" be held, to which all interested AAS members would be invited. The rationale behind this proposal was that the relatively undeveloped field of Korean Studies had been represented by a substantial number of participants at the 1964 AAS annual meeting. Scholars felt that Korean Studies was on the threshold of becoming recognized as a field of its own, and that at this time it needed encouragement from the leaders of the AAS. They also requested, therefore that support be given to the Korean Studies group for creating a series of panels and international symposia that would demonstrate the contemporary state of Korean Studies in five areas: (1) traditional Korea; (2) the Japanese period; (3) the development of South Korea; (4) the development of North Korea; and (5) Korean modernization and problems of Korean reintegration.

They feel that increased activity in "these five areas would facilitate and make relevant more specialized study in the fields of Chinese and Japanese Studies, and they emphasized that "strengthened Korean Studies can both more effectively draw upon and contribute to the study of China and Japan."

Professor Wright subsequently contacted Hesung Chun Koh at Yale Law School. In discussing the efforts made to organize the Korean Studies scholars, he referred to the two letters mentioned above: the one from Dr. Henthorn and the other jointly signed by Professors Kim, Yang, Paige, and Lee. Professor Wright felt strongly that a Korean Studies Association should not be established outside of the Association for Asian Studies, but rather as a committee within it. He expressed his personal support for such a committee, and he strongly urged Professor Koh to communicate to her Korean colleagues

that there should be one, not two, separate efforts. Professor Wright emphasized that without a united front from the scholars in Korean Studies, other leaders in the Association would not be particularly sympathetic to the launching of any organizational effort for Asian Studies.

Throughout the previous year, Arthur Wright had received both formal and informal requests from Kwang Lim Koh and Hesung Chun Koh for the creation of a Korean Studies program at Yale. This was the Koh couple's second year of teaching a course entitled "East Asian Law and Society" at the Yale Law School. They emphasized the close interrelationship between Chinese, Korean, and Japanese history and culture and pointed out that without a proper understanding of the role that Korea had played in East Asian civilization, the development of Chinese and Japanese Studies were sure to suffer.** At that time, however, the Chinese and Japanese programs at Yale were soliciting support for their own expansion and development, and they considered the addition of a Korean Studies program a burden that they could not afford to bear. In order to convince Professor Wright, who was the Chairman of the Council of International and Area Studies at Yale, the Kohs continued to push for the Korean Studies program.

Calls for such a program came not only from the Kohs, but also from Dr. Paik Nak-Jun, a distinguished Yale alumnus in Korea, and then-President of Yonsei University. Dr. Paik, quite independently from the Kohs, wrote to President Kingman Brewster of Yale University and offered to raise funds in Korea if Yale University were to initiate a Korean Studies program.

By this time Arthur F. Wright was well aware of the importance of this rising Korean Studies movement. After speaking with Hesung Koh about the two letters to the AAS, Professor Wright seemed glad to help Korean scholars and made repeated comments recognizing the significance of Korean Studies. He was, therefore, ready and willing to support the initiation of a Committee on Korean Studies within the AAS.

On October 27, 1964, in his capacity as President of the AAS, Arthur Wright sent his reply to Professors Chong Sik Lee and Glenn Paige. This letter contained the following basic messages: (1) that it would be extremely difficult, as well as academically unwise, to establish a separate Association for Korean Studies; (2) that there was a possibility that the Association would allocate funds in the future for the development of Korean Studies, for which the Board of Directors would need a more detailed plan of operations; and (3) that it would be no problem to schedule an evening meeting on Korean Studies during the 1965 San Francisco meeting. He encouraged Korean Studies scholars to get together and discuss possible modes of development for this field.

On December 10, 1964, Professor Henthorn wrote to the Association for Asian Studies Secretariat requesting a room for this informal meeting, and enclosed a slate of nominees for a Korean Studies Committee within the Association. The list of names for the proposed eight-member committee, including scholars in both the United States and Europe, was as follows:

Edward Wagner	Harvard University
Peter Lee	University of Hawaii
Michael C. Rogers	University of California, Berkeley
Glenn Paige	Princeton University
Chong Sik Lee	University of Pennsylvania
William Henthorn	University of Hawaii
William Skillend	University of London
Fritz Vos	University of Leiden

At the same time, Professor Henthorn inquired about the possibility of forming a research and development group on Korean Studies, and asked in particular whether the annual Bibliography of Asian Studies, published by the AAS, would be interested in providing a more comprehensive coverage of Korea. Later that month, Professor Peter Gosling, Secretary of the AAS, formally wrote to Professor Henthorn to express the AAS's interest in creating a liaison between the Korean Studies group, the AAS Newsletter, and the Bibliography of Asian Studies. Professor Gosling went on to request a proposal for organizing and convening a Committee on Korean Studies.

Beginning in January 1965, Professor Henthorn began to receive general circulars issued by the Secretariat, along with a mailing list. About a year after his initial letter to the AAS, on March 12, 1965, an Ad Hoc Committee on Korean Studies" was established, via a letter from Henthorn that was sent to all the AAS members in the U.S. and Europe who were interested in Korean Studies. The members of this Ad Hoc Committee were:

Chong Sik Lee	Political Science	University of Pennsylvania
Peter Lee	Literature	University of Hawaii
Gad Ledyard	History	Columbia University
Glenn Paige	Political Science	Princeton University
Michael C. Rogers	History	University of California, Berkeley
William Skillend	Literature	University of London
Fritz Vos	History	University of Leiden
DooSoo Suh	Literature	University of Washington
Edward Wagner	History	Harvard University
William Henthorn	History	University of Hawaii

This letter also announced a special session on Korea, which was to be held at the 1965 Annual Meeting under panel chairman Professor William Skillend. The session was on Korean Literature. Through the active and dedicated service of the handful of leaders mentioned above, and with the enthusiastic leadership of Dr. William Henthorn, an Ad Hoc Committee was established in 1965.

The first meeting was held on the evening of April 3, 1965, during the San Francisco Annual Meeting of the Association. It proved to be a real landmark for the Committee on Korean Studies. The meeting was conducted under the chairmanship of William Henthorn, with Spencer Palmer of Brigham Young University acting as Secretary. Both Chong Sik Lee and Spencer Palmer raised the question of who would be considered "legitimate scholars on Korea," and advocated open membership for all those who were interested in joining the Association's framework.

On May 11, 1965, a new section on Korea was added to the Association for Asian Studies quarterly Newsletter. In September, Dr. Henthorn, as Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee, appointed Frank Baldwin of Columbia University (who was then in Tokyo, working on his dissertation) as the news editor on Korea of the Newsletter. Within a month, Frank Baldwin began to solicit news from scholars in Korea, Japan, and Europe. For the first time, Korean Studies scholars could disseminate on a regular basis news concerning academic programs, conferences, research activities, and bibliographic notes.

The 1966 Annual Meeting, which was held the following spring in New York, provided scholars in Korean Studies with opportunities to interact and exchange information, person-to-person, through both a formal panel and an open meeting. The panel, titled, "Increase of Social Scale and Change of Social Values in Korea" was chaired by Hattie Colton of the Foreign Service Institute at the Department of State and included a formal presentation by Herbert

Berringer from the University of Delaware. The featured discussants were: Gregory Henderson, Center for International Affairs at Harvard University; Ilpyong Kim, Indiana University; and Maner Thorpe, Columbia University. The discussions at the panel, which attracted an audience of about 100 people, were lively and impressive. The open meeting was for all who were interested in Korean Studies, and was held at the Sambok Restaurant, which gave the discussions an informal and friendly air. This gathering fostered warm feelings among colleagues, and identified a substantial number of people interested in Korea.

Formal approval of the Committee on Korean Studies finally came at the February 1967 meeting of the AAS Board of Directors. In March 1967, Hesung Chun Koh and Gari Ledyard were elected to be the first Chairperson and Secretary (respectively) of this new Committee for a two-year term, from 1967 to 1969. In accordance with a request from the AAS Board, the Committee was reorganized to include only seven members on its Executive Committee. Professor Glenn Paige was subsequently elected to the AAS Board of Directors to represent the interests of the Korean Studies Committee at the 1967 Annual Meeting. The Executive Members were:

Soon Sung Cho	Political Science	University of Nebraska
William Henthorne	History	Princeton University
Hesung Chun Koh*	Sociology	Yale University
Gari Ledyard	History	Columbia University
Peter Lee	Literature	University of Hawaii
Edward Wagner	History	Harvard University

The sequel to this article describes the activities of the CKS in its first two years, 1967-1969.

In fact, the story that needs to be told even before the formative years of CKS is the early 1950s to 1960s relationship between the development of Korean Studies at Harvard University, the Korea Institute (the original name of East Rock Institute established in Cambridge, MA, 1952 and incorporated in 1956 by Kwang Lim Koh and Hesung Chun Koh) and the subsequent appointment of Edwin O. Reischauer (then Professor of Japanese History and Acting Director of Harvard-Yenching Institute) as United States Ambassador to Japan.

*Hesung Chun Koh retired 1985 from Yale after 24 years of teaching and research there. And devoted her full time at East Rock Institute as Chair and President until her retirement as President three years ago. She continues to be the Chair of East Rock Institute. She was visiting Professor at National Museum of Ethnology (NME) in Osaka and also at the International Research Center of Japanese Center (Nichibunken) in Kyoto during 1996-1999. She was the first chair of CKS of AAS 1967-69, Executive member 1983-1986, and a member of the Advisory Editorial Board on 30th Anniversary Number of the Journal of Asian Studies, 1971-1972. See www.eastrockinstitute.org. Email: Hesung.Koh@yale.edu.

** During 1996-1999, 18th century Criminal law cases of China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam all in Chinese characters were analyzed and computerized under the leadership of Hesung Chun Koh at National Museum of Ethnology, Japan and continued to refine the database subsequently at East Rock Institute. This project was supported by grants from the Japanese Ministry of Education, Science Research Fund and participated by a team of 11 international and interdisciplinary scholars. Articles generated by this project support their argument of the importance of Korean studies in East Asian Studies.