

Special Review

Korean Cultural Heritage in
North Korea—Past, Present, and
Future of South and North Korea's
Collaborative Exchanges

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Editor's Note

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In the past, for the Special Review sections, the *Review of Korean Studies* (hereafter, *RKS*) has either invited collective reviews on foreign trends in Koreanology studies abroad, or convened a group of experts to review activities unfolding inside the Korean academic community. For the former occasions, we have once reviewed recent Koreanology studies in Japan in the December 2019 issue and will deal with recent studies in China for the next issue, June 2021. For the latter on the other hand, while we earlier reviewed Artistic studies, exhibitions, and other forms of activities in South Korea in the last issue of June 2020, we decided it would be both timely and meaningful if we could review how things have been going on between the two Koreas, in terms of their continued efforts of cultural heritage exchanges.

For the occasion, we invited five distinctive experts who have already explored this issue in various capacities. Their opinions and reviews, and not to mention all the efforts of countless scholars, researchers, and experts discussed in them, should be made available to foreign readers. We are more than certain that this special review would inform people around the world of the Korean people's efforts to change the status quo for a brighter future.

In terms of important complexes of cultural heritages, there are multiple focal points in North Korea. The Manwoldae Palace of Goryeo in Kaesong could easily be cited as one of them, but come to think of it, the Kaesong city itself is a vast treasure chest full of important vestiges and artifacts from all periods of Korean history. And of course, Kaesong is only one area, which constitutes merely a small portion of the entire North Korean region. Simply speaking, there are so many things that should be covered in this section.

First, Curator-Researcher Cho Eunkyung from the National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage provides us with a review on how the excavation of the Manwoldae Palace in Kaesong proceeded until now, and what tasks await us in the future in her article entitled "Achievements and Future Prospects of the

Kaesong Manwoldae Excavation, Main Palace of Goryeo Dynasty.’

Having been the site for the Goryeo dynasty’s main palace, Kaesong Manwoldae has a number of vestiges that are considered to be the most valuable sources of information on Goryeo history. South and North Korea’s joint excavation of the area is also a landmark effort as it is currently the longest standing project, the initiation of which goes all the way back to 2007. The project managed to cover roughly 60% of the entire site planned for excavation over 8 individual phases.

According to Cho, the site is composed of a total of 5 sections, which revealed embankments, drains, and walls that allowed us to identify the general layout of the palace, as well as roof tiles, porcelain, and iron-based items that show us the lifestyles inside the palace of the time. And while praising the fact that excavations and researches of not only the Western group of buildings but other important segments of the site are now well underway, she also expresses concerns about the lack of microscopic examination of individual sections all over the site and strongly argues that it is imperative that both Korea find the time to process the findings together, and issue joint reports of what they came to learn.

Next, the North Korean authorities’ preservation policies of the general Kaesong area and its historical significance are well documented in the review provided by Lee Sang Jun, who formerly served at the National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage, entitled “Policies for Protection and Management of Cultural Properties in Kaesong City, Trends and changes.”

All kinds of valuable and important artifacts can be found from Kaesong, whose three sides face either a river or the sea. Among many cultural heritage sites and artifacts found in this city, a dominant portion is from the Goryeo period as the city itself was Goryeo’s own capital. But of course, important sites and relics from the Joseon period excavated here are also in abundance. The city was devastated multiple times by foreign invasions and was heavily pillaged during the Japanese colonization period, but according to Lee, as post-war urban developments concentrated on particular areas of the city and left relics in other areas relatively untouched, cultural heritage of the area survived, enough to convince the UNESCO to recognize the city as the World Heritage Site in 2013.

This leads to another important reminder from him which highlights the importance of the information contained in regular North Korean reports to

the UNESCO regarding the current situation of the Kaesong city. Such reports let us know the condition of the property and artifacts, and problems that we would be facing in the future.

Professor Kyung-hee Jang, in her review entitled “Achievements in Studies of North Korean Cultural Heritage and Future Prospects,” shares with us her personal experiences of visiting, witnessing, examining, and studying cultural artifacts, vestiges, and other forms of Korean cultural legacy either found or currently remain in North Korea.

Her review centers on the period from 2005 to 2010 when South Korean scholars were frequently allowed to visit North Korea, and personnel on both sides were able to conduct academic exchanges most vigorously. Professor Jang was able to meet with people who were well versed in traditional techniques of Korean embroidery and porcelain art, and visit museums in the Kaesong and Pyongyang areas. She also examined all the Goryeo and early Joseon royal mausoleums currently located in the North Korean region. Her experiences led to publications on the Korean Central History Museum in Pyongyang, and the Goryeo period’s royal mausoleums.

She proposes that when exchange projects would resume between the two Korea, South Korean scholars and personnel should endeavor to make a registry of all the relics and artifacts in custody of North Korean museums. Albeit North Korean National treasures are already well categorized into 22 categories, other relics and artifacts scattered throughout the North Korean region are yet to be properly surveyed and studied, and some of them are left unattended, being further damaged with every passing day.

So, the above three reviews concentrated on various areas of North Korean cultural heritage. The next two are dedicated to reviewing how collaborative projects arranged by both South and North Korean experts have fared over the years.

First, about the past and present of South and North Korean cooperation, Professor Jeon Young-sun offers a detailed recollection in his review entitled “Looking Back upon Inter-Korean Exchange and Cooperation Projects on Cultural Heritage, and Future Prospects.”

He first examines all the diplomatic efforts that continued between South and North Korean authorities in past treaties and agreements, and then cited notable achievements by the two Korea that led to the retrieval of important artifacts from abroad, or other joint surveys, restoration projects, and large-

scale publications. He also introduces to us what kind of civilian efforts have continued so far and calls for the expansion of the civilian sector's role as the two Koreas' cultural exchanges cannot afford to rely on the ever-fluctuating political climate.

In the end, his proposal includes the expansion of joint projects, collaborations for traditional techniques' preservation, and the establishment of organizational bodies that would sustain future efforts. Interestingly, according to him, there has been an inherent difference in South and North Korean scholars' attitude; while the former always prioritized the restoration and preservation of the original status of cultural properties, the latter has been more interested in trying to figure out what role traditional culture could play in the current environment. It is a fundamental difference to be sure, and the answer may lie somewhere in-between.

And finally, concerning all the academic exchanges that continued between South and North Korean historical communities, Professor Ahn Byung-woo offers an extensive review of the past and present efforts in his review entitled "Progress and Achievements of Inter-Korean Exchanges in Historical Studies."

He points out that for 70 years South and North Korean scholars have advanced their own studies, but they had trouble sharing such accomplishments with each other in a constructive fashion. Attempts to convene councils of South and North Korean Historians continued, and conferences were organized by international academic circles as well as Korean institutions such as the National Institute of Korean History, Northeast Asian History Foundation, and most of all, the Academy of Korean Studies.

Professor Ahn provides us with a detailed history of academic conferences conceived and arranged by South and North Korean scholars and historians since the beginning of the 2000s, which primarily dealt with issues such as the atrocities of Japanese Imperialism, the Dokdo Island, and the proper name to address the East Sea, along with the ancient history of the Korean race. He also recollects the activities of South Korea's Inter-Korean Historians Association, which has been engaged in multiple efforts with North Korea's Historical Research Institute of the Chosun Academy of Social Sciences on a variety of projects.

At the same time, he also points out that past achievements have displayed one problem, namely past collaborations not being ideally multilateral, but quite the opposite. South Korean scholars' frequent visits to North Korea were

not reciprocated by North Korean scholars' visits to the South, while the former was able to visit all kinds of historical sites in North Korea when the latter was either not able or willing to. There have been plenty of exhibitions featuring North Korean relics in South Korea, but cases of the opposite were rare, to put it mildly. And all the themes in previous collaborations so far have not included all the grounds that would have to be ultimately covered. Professor Ahn observes these as issues that would have to be addressed in the future.

After reading these five reviews, it should become obvious to readers that it has been a long journey for the two Koreas, as they tried to reconcile their differences while appreciating what they share. Such efforts should continue in the future unabated, to ensure that people be aware of what kind of endeavors came before. The *RKS* salutes all those efforts of the past half-century, and pay humble respect to the contributors of this Special Review section. Their efforts and our awareness shall pave the way for a new future between the two Koreas, which would most certainly be a sight to see for the entire world.