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The modern history of the library movement and reading campaign in Korea

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the history of library movement and reading campaign in Korea since 1900. Korean people tried in many ways to establish their own libraries in 20th century. Many library thinkers, intellectuals, and librarians have struggled to build

modern libraries in communities or nationwide. Although Korea has a brilliant history of record and print, it has been so hard to establish libraries for the Korean people during last century. The Korean libraries have endured hardships such as Japanese colonialism, Korean War, and military dictatorship. This paper examines the Korean people's efforts to establish libraries, and it looks into the history of library movement in Korea. And also this paper introduces the recent reading campaigns such as 'Bookstart', 'One Book One City'. With historical lessons suggested in this paper, people may have some insight to make and develop libraries in Korea.

1. Introduction

Korean public libraries in the 20th Century grew by undergoing history of formidable obstacles. In the so-called 21st Century's knowledge-based society, public libraries in Korea are not yet standing tall as the 'people's college'. In other words, each public library is not establishing itself as a core institution that supports regional residents' access to information, education and culture. Today, one of the key roles of public libraries in Korea is to merely provide seats for users who study based on rote memorization.

This phenomenon may have stemmed from the failure of the movement for the construction of Korean people's libraries as a part of Koreans' self-autonomous modernization project. Despite it all, however, Koreans continued to make an effort to construct and safeguard genuine sense of libraries after resisting obstacles in history during the past 100 years.

This paper refers to this effort as the 'library movement', and seeks to highlight the path that this movement journeyed on in the modern Korean history. Meanwhile, 'reading movement' also took place along with the library movement to enhance Koreans' literacy and intelligence and to create a healthy society.

This paper does not detail out the history of modern library movement in Korea. Instead, it explains by introducing key figures and case studies because what is most important in the library movement is the people, and we feel that it is necessary to highlight the effort and achievements of the key figures or library thinkers in Korea.

2. Movement to Construct Libraries during the 'Daehanjegyuk' Era (1901~1909)

Modernization in Korea began in the latter end of the 19th Century with the effort of the enlightenment camp and patriots who were concerned about the nation. As the Western civilization continued to flow into this land and as the influence of the Japanese imperialism increased, they sought to build libraries of the modern sense to enlighten the public and seek independence as a modern nation.

2.1 Self-Reflection of Koreans and Movement to Establish 'Daehan Library'

In 1906, key figures such as Lee Keun-sang, Lee Beom-gu and Yoon Chi-ho formed a committee to establish a library. As such, 'Daehan Library' came into being in Korean history thanks to the personal efforts of the leaders. Moreover, this was also the first time that the denomination, 'library' was first used in Korea. Prior to that time, there

were many diverse denominations that referred to the buildings that played the role of library for the long history on this land.

The press also actively participated in this library movement, and many figures of various fields read the articles and in turn donated many books. However, 'Daehan Library' was unfortunately not disclosed to the public due to the beginning of Japanese colonialism in Korea, and 100,000 books collected were taken away by the Joseon(Chosun) Government-General in 1911.

2.2 'Daedong Seogwan' – First Privately Run Public Library

Meanwhile, enlightenment movement was taking place in Pyeongyang, yet another hub, in the form of library establishment movement. In 1906, prominent figures in Pyeongyang established the 'Daedong Seogwan' Library in Jongno, Pyeongyang, which is Korea's first modern public library established by the private sector. Although this library's name is old-fashioned, it was run privately and made available to the general public for free. Moreover, it also engaged in publishing business. Hence, this was a library in the modern sense.

Since then, there were other attempts to establish public libraries privately by Koreans. Moreover, Confucians who resisted Japanese invasion established schools for the education of their children. Meanwhile, Japanese in Korea established some reading clubs which functioned like mini-libraries for themselves.

3. Library Movement during Japanese Occupation (1910~1945)

At the same time as Japanese colonization of Korea, Japan closed down Korean newspapers and magazines, and brought about the dark age whereby it sought to demolish the spirit of the Korean people by permitting merely Joseon Government-General approved newspapers and magazines. Moreover, it adopted strict screening out process for general books, and confiscated and burnt everything that sought to increase sense of awareness for the Korean ethnicity. However, this type of repressive Japanese colonialism in fact did just the opposite, resulting in increased awareness. As the resistant movement expanded, the March 1 Independence Movement took place in 1919. Even amidst this dark age, the figures who studied the new academic fields engaged in the movement to establish privately run public libraries with the catch phrase of nation building and saving people.

3.1 Yun Ik-seon and ‘Gyeongseong Library’

Yun Ik-seon is the person who established the ‘Gyeongseong Library’, a library for Koreans, in 1919 after the March 1 Independence Movement. During the Movement, he was active as the president of the Joseon Independence News, and was imprisoned after distributing newspaper to students and the public. After his release in 1920, he established the ‘Gyeongseong Library’ as his first business initiative. At the time, he was lent the Joseon House of Peers’ Building of the time for free, and invested his entire assets along with Kim Jang-hwan and Yun Yang-gu to establish the library. Moreover, they formed a club(Friends of Library) with other figures who shared a common goal, and they in turn donated money for operation cost.

Likewise, Gyeongseong Library is not only a library but also the base of enlightenment movement for the Koreans. According to the news article of the time that covered the opening of this library, “There were 300 visitors, and thousands of students. Most of the participants volunteered to become friends of libraries.”(Maeil Sinbo News, 29th Nov. 1920). Later, donations came from all parts, the collection of books increased, and the number of users increased. In particular, the fact that reading room for women and girls was established is an example of Gyeongseong Library’s modern nature.

3.2 Lee Beom-seung and ‘Gyeongseong Library’

In 1921, one year after Gyeongseong Library was established, a 32 year-old Lee Beom-seung established another library in Jongno, Seoul, ‘Gyeongseong Library.’ He majored law at the Kyoto University in Japan, and was an elite who spoke various foreign languages with ease. He sought to mitigate the pain of a repressed nation with the library movement. In 1919 still a student, he wrote a long letter to the president of Maeil Sinbo News to ask for the establishment of a library in Korea to celebrate the marriage of King Yeongchin (the last prince of Korea), to take place in 1920 in Japan. His letters were published during a week with the title “Hope for the Establishment of a Library.” Two years later, he established yet another ‘Gyeongseong Library’ in the Pagoda Park with the approval of the Joseon Government-General. To this, all the news and media in the colonial era commended his library movement.

Since then, when Yun Ik-seun faced operation difficulty for his Library, Yun Ik-seun and Lee Beom-seung entered into an agreement to transfer Yun’s library to Lee. Moreover, when Yun left to Manchuria to work as a superintendent of a school, Lee became the sole manager of the Gyeongseong Library. For the children with no education, he set a separate children library inside the library, operated two-year long elementary education program, and set the closing hour at 10 pm to accommodate the need of the users.

However, His Gyeongseong Library also faced financial hardship years later, as it could not pay back the bank loan. Despite newspapers' imploring to safeguard the library, it was transferred over to the Gyeongseong Prefecture in 1926, which means that the Korean library is now under the Japanese control. Luckily, Lee Beom-seung became the first Mayor of Seoul after the Korean independence, and upgraded 'Gyeongseong Library' to the 'Seoul City Jongno Public Library'.

4. Chaos and Reconstructing Korean Libraries (1945~1960)

On August 1945, Korea faced independence after 35-year long Japanese colonialism. After its independence, Korea underwent three-year long US control, and then the Korean government was established on August 1948. However, due to the Korean War that lasted three years from June 1950, Korea fell into political and economic chaos and ideological turmoil. During this period, the Korean society was deeply influenced by the US in many areas.

4.1 Park Bong-seok and Movement to Form the Basis of Korean Libraries

Park Bong-seok, who was working as a librarian at the Joseon Government-General, took over the Joseon Government-General library when Korea was liberated, and established the National Library in October 1945. From the Japanese, he took over all other libraries in the Seoul area, and led the movement to collect national literatures by collecting all types of printed materials, recognizing its importance.

Moreover, recognizing the need to train qualified and competent librarians with the increase in the number of libraries, he established a national school of library that offered one-year long program in 1946. While coming up with Joseon Decimal Classification, he also made Joseon Cataloging Rules to contribute to the Korea's bibliographic standardization while lecturing.

In 1945, he established the Joseon Library Association, and became its first president. The association played a core role in understanding the realities of the libraries and in taking over and operating those libraries nationwide amidst the social chaos immediately after the liberation (Dong-geun Oh, p. 44).

4.2 Movement to Establish Educational Institution for the Training of Librarians

After the liberation, the leaders of the Korean libraries, attempted to increase the number of libraries against the government and the society by leveraging nationwide library establishment movement 'One County, One Library'. Moreover, they unfolded movement to join forces with citizens such as establishment of 'Library Support Committee' starting from 1948 to support the movement for library establishment, an

initiative that may be otherwise considered lower priority in the building of a new nation. After the Korean War, libraries were damaged as buildings were burned down and books burned. However, thanks to these efforts, the number of public libraries increased. Along the way, the need for the establishment of educational institutions that can train library personnel increased in addition to the re-education of existing librarians.

With the re-establishment of the Korean Library Association in 1955, figures of the Korean libraries began to pressure the government for the establishment of undergraduate level program for the training of librarians. In 1951, the Ministry of Education's attempt to dispatch students to the US type of Japan Library School at the Keio University failed, and as the ministry's standard for university libraries was announced in 1955, the library circle's interest in the training of librarians reached its peak. In 1955, with the effort of Lee Pong-soon, the head of the Ewha Womans University Library, courses on library studies were established at the university. In 1957, the Department of Library Science was established at the Yonsei University as the desire of the Korean library circle was taken in by the George Peabody College Mission(Jae-soon Jo, 2004, pp. 43-57). Likewise, the history of undergraduate-level librarian education institutions began in Korea, and later this model was disseminated to the rest of the nation.

4.3 Campaign for Literacy Education as a Reading Movement

To the Koreans who could not use the Korean language during the long Japanese colonialism, the most pressing education of all was literacy of the Korean language. According to the statistics of the time, merely 20% could read Korean. It is obvious that some form of reading capability is required for using library and reading. For this reason, the government placed weight on the Korean literacy education policy. Libraries came up with the slogan, "Literacy starts from One County, One Library. Illiteracy is the foremost sorrow of the human beings", and sought to raise people's literacy which is the basis of the reading movement later on.

5. Library Movement under Authoritarian Regime (1961~1979)

The Korean society of this period was under the military rule of Park Chung-hee during 18 years. To bring down the authoritarian rule of Rhee Seung-man which lasted for 12 years after the establishment of the nation, April 19 uprising took place in 1960. However, Park Chung-hee regime was established by coup d'état in 1961. Characteristics of this era are that significant economic growth took place thanks to the government-lead 'Sae Ma-eul(New Village) Movement and powerful economic development policies.

5.1 Library Law Enactment Movement

After the Korean War, the Korean library figures began to recognize that it is necessary to delineate the basic conditions for the advancement of libraries on a legal level. During this time, focus was placed on the movement that entailed establishing library related policies and the legal basis for their execution. In the 1955 general meeting for the re-establishment of the Korean Library Association, the association started the movement for library law enactment in a full fledged manner.

Since then, this movement continued on for eight years. In 1963, the Library Law was enacted, and the enforcement ordinance for this law was announced in 1965. The Library Law became the basis for the advancement of the Korean libraries.

5.2 Ohm Dae-sup and Village Mini-Library Movement

Ohm Dae-sup, who decided to commit his entire life to the library movement after reading one book about library management, was the person who acted out the mini-library movement in Korea. Later while working as the Secretary-General of the Korean Library Association, he set up privately run library in Gyeongju, and operated itinerating mini-libraries for the people of farming and fishing village starting from 1951. With this experience, he established the 'Association of Village Mini-Library' in 1961, and invested all his personal assets to engage in village mini-library movement nationwide. His mini-libraries consisted of three key elements – small bookshelf whereby books were placed and managed, a reading club that centered on the young people over the age of 14, and collection of 30 books needed to increase level of culture in antiquated agricultural and fishery communities (Sang-kyun Park, p. 493).

The village mini-libraries that started with 26 reached up to commendable level of 35,000 by the latter end of 1970s as it reached even the lowest administrative unit in the rural communities nationwide, and it continued to expand its services by linking with public libraries (David Kaser, pp. 6035-6038). However, the village mini-libraries movement, which continued on for 20 years could not overcome financial hardship, and it was turned over to the government in 1981 to continue to this day. And the name, 'Ma-eul mungo(village mini-library)' was changed as 'Sae ma-eul mungo (New village mini-library)'.

This 'Ma-eul mungo movement' was also the reading movement led by the private sector that intended to cover the poor public library system in Korea. This became the turning point for installing small libraries of the modern sense of the word in all of Korea, and became the root of the small library movement that is taking place today. (Pong-soon Lee and Young-ai Um, pp. 70-73).

5.3 Reading Movement led by National and Public Libraries

Public libraries during this era became merely a place for people to study at due to the education fever of Korean society and college entrance oriented education system. However, despite it all, the effort made by the national and public libraries to provide library services to the regional society and to distribute the library culture did not cease.

Reading movement was manifested in the form of social movement to improve Korean's reading habits with the National Library of Korea and the Korean Library Association as the main forces. The National Library of Korea focused on developing the reading population and on establishing the reading policies of Korea. These attempts in turn were unfolded nationwide, and made synergy effects through linking with the village mini-library movement in some public libraries. The Korean Library Association focused on the reading movement as well to increase the Koreans' willingness to read through reading week campaign.

6. Library Movement and Reading Campaign in the Information Age (1980 ~ present)

The Korean society during the 1980s, democratization movement was fierce resisting the military regime that came into being with military coup d'état. The military regime repressed and controlled social movement and the press and media activities. Meanwhile, the socio-cultural movement that sought after democracy increased like spring. After June 1987 struggle for democratization, political rigidity in the Korean society became relatively lax, and the Koreans' cultural need increased in turn. Accordingly, the Ministry of Culture was newly established to meet people's cultural need. Moreover, library movement unfolded towards the direction of strengthening the role and recognizing the professional nature of librarians. Moreover, revision of Library Law took place as well.

As the Korean society entered mid 1990s, it began to race ahead to the information age. Both the government and the companies began to focus on information industry with the catch phrase, 'Korea of Powerful Information Technology'.

6.1 Library Movement of 'Daehan Library Research Association'

'Daehan Library Research Association' is an organization for library movement that sought to modernize library operation during the early and mid 1980s. This organization, conceived by Ohm Dae-sup sought to find concrete and realistic solutions to the problems that the libraries faced during the 1980s. The following are some examples.

First, the 'Open-stack and circulation movement' is the campaign that sought to make the books, kept within library's stack room, open to the general public. This movement

which was started from 1985, was implemented by some leading libraries, and then was rolled out nationwide. Next is the 'Mobile-library distribution movement' that engaged in service where the books are delivered on cars to find users. The key members of the Association like Ohm Dae-sup, Jo Won-ho and Lee Yong-nam developed mobile library, and as they publicized this widely by leveraging the press and the media, the government also played a part in distributing this system nationwide. The Seoul City also joined this movement to distribute on its own. Moreover, 'Entrance-fee elimination movement' was to eliminate entrance-fee to the library. At the time, public library charged low entrance fee according to the Library Law of 1963, and the Association actively sought to demolish this fee claiming that this goes against the basic purpose of public libraries. As the news began to advocate this claim, the National Library of Korea and other libraries eliminated entrance-fee, and public libraries abolished entrance-fee starting in 1992 nationwide according to the Library Law (Yeon-ok Lee, pp. 136-147).

6.2 Professional Movement of 'Librarians Association of Korea'

'Librarians Association of Korea' is the organization that was formed in 1990 to engage in systemic library movement and to speak out the issues related to libraries and librarians. This emerged by the medium of the librarians' identity that hopes for the modernization of the Korean libraries amidst the wave of social movement of the 1980s. The association for 10 years after its establishment recommended policy alternatives for all types of issues, and countered in a systematic manner. Moreover, by publishing *Bulletin of Librarians Association of Korea*, it played a central role in speaking on behalf of the librarians. However, it could not earn support from all the librarians as its color was rather progressive, facing difficulty in vitalizing the organization since the movement could not grow into library movement at the individual library level (Yeon-ok Lee, pp. 147-158).

Later in 1995, another library movement organization that consisted of young librarians emerged. This organization was called 'Library Movement Research Association'. Starting with raising issues such as unstable employment of the female librarians, it unfolded movement of discussing and countering all types of issues. Moreover, it published a magazine, *Library Movement* and this was changed into the *Library with People* in 2000.

6.3 'Small Library' Movement

Social movement of the 1980s significantly influenced civilian level library movement. Among the social movement forces, some people of library movement created small libraries as the cultural, information and educational center for the

residents and laborers. Names of these private libraries that emerged from the latter end of 1980s are various such as reading center, reading room for residents, cultural center, children's library etc.

Entering into the 1990s, this private library movement expanded into the movement that sought to establish 'small library'. In particular, this movement engaged in operation in a full fledged manner by recommending the installation of libraries for the 'Library and Reading Promotion Law,' enacted in 1994. Accordingly, 'small libraries' emerged nationwide in apartment complexes, churches, town assembly halls, care centers, hospitals, military bases etc. On March 1994, 'Small Library Association' was also formed, and this movement was unfolded nationwide. However, these small libraries faced many problems in actual operation. In other words, very often the people who operate these libraries purchase books with their own money, and the operation was unsatisfactory due to poor awareness of local autonomous entity, lack of support by public libraries etc. This 'small library movement' speaks for the desire of the regional residents for libraries that the existing public libraries could not satisfy.

Recently, significant desire of the communities to build children's libraries is rising. In particular, the 'Miracle Library' project that began in 2003 is the representative case. This movement has led by the 'Citizen Action for Reading Culture', which is a pan-Korean reading campaign organization. This movement that enjoyed powerful support of the broadcasting industry induced the support of the general public. Up until now, it opened nine Miracle Libraries nationwide. This movement helped the Koreans realize the need for children's libraries, and stimulated each regional organization to establish children's libraries.

6.4 Reading Campaign in Digital Era

During recent years, successful cases of reading movement from overseas are unfolding in Korea. Some of representative examples are the 'Bookstart' and 'One Book, One City' campaign.

'Bookstart movement' is the campaign that provides free picture books to the infants who are less than a year old. This movement which began in the UK is now being pursued in Korea as well after Japan. Starting with a pilot program in 2003, many public libraries and health care centers nationwide are adopting this program.

'One Book, One City' is the campaign for reading culture whereby one book, designated by selecting and voting process in a city, is read by all the residents to hold discussions and to enjoy diverse set of cultural programs. This movement that was started in Seattle, US in 1998 was soon rolled out to the rest of the US, and it is now expanding into Canada, UK and so forth. In the case of Korea, this movement is pursued in Seosan, Suncheon, Busan, Seoul, Wonju, Iksan and so forth. As of 2006,

many cases of this movement are being led by public libraries, local autonomous entities and citizens' organizations. In the case of Seoul, individual libraries are pursuing this movement instead of the entire city.

7. Conclusion

Even while experiencing formidable history during the past century, Koreans actively have unfolded various library movements. This paper examined the history of modern libraries in Korea from the library and reading movement aspect. In particular, it focused on committed library movement figures, library thinkers and organizations.

In the digital era, Korea's library movement and reading campaign will continue to play a role. Towards this end, it is necessary to engage in library movement on the historical foundation built by various figures who sought to pioneer into libraries in this land, and we Koreans need to remember their passion and commitment.

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