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Australasian Strategies for an Advancement of Korean Language Education

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1. Introduction

This paper aims to address current issues that Korean language education communities in Australasia¹ are facing and to explore the best workable strategies that can be helpful in overcoming problems and advancing the profile of Korean language education in the region. In this paper, I will focus my discussion and argument on the following four areas: 1) changes in governmental policies and countermeasures from the Australasian Korean language teaching communities; 2) reductions of secondary Korean language programs; 3) the relationship between Korean language programs and Korea-related studies programs; and 4) the implications of the presence of local Korean residents. Where relevant and necessary, however, I will review the achievements and failures of the past and examine the recent (the past 3-5 years) developments at both policy and institution levels, to suggest directions and strategies for a revitalization of Korean language programs.

To prepare for this paper, I have conducted a quick survey² by email and exchanged views with some Korean language educators by telephone or in person but since the information collection was not comprehensive or systematic, I admit that this paper has limitations in revealing the entire picture of the issues in question, especially in the description of the experiences of New Zealand. It is nonetheless a fundamentally accurate specification for the current situation.

¹ Australian universities offering Korean as a major are seven and they are, in alphabetical order, Australian National University, Curtin University of Technology, Griffith University, Monash University, University of New South Wales, University of Queensland and University of Sydney. In New Zealand, University of Auckland is the only university that offers Korean as a major. Apart from universities, there are some post-secondary 'technical' institutions (e.g. TAFE colleges in NSW, Victoria and South Australia) that offer vocational Korean. It is difficult to provide any statistical information about secondary schools in this paper as their current and near-future situations are uncertain.

² I thank all the respondents for their valuable comments: Drs Greg Evon, Insil Choe Yoon, Dong Bae Lee, Roald H. Maliangkay, Mrs Sookhee MacRoberts and anonymous colleagues.

2. Developmental phases

The ‘systematic’ implementation of Korean language programs into Australian schools and tertiary institutions from the late 1980s through to the mid-1990s was largely motivated: 1) by federal and state governmental policy documents such as *National Policy on Languages* (1987)³ and *State Language Policy* (1988)⁴; or 2) by government-commissioned academic reports such as ‘Ingleson Report’ (1989)⁵ and ‘Garnaut Report’ (1989)⁶. These and other influential policy documents and reports stimulated the virtually simultaneous multiple births of Korean courses at secondary schools and universities within five years or by 1994. The defunct National Korean Studies Centre (which spent or wasted more than A\$1 million) and the traceless Korean Through Technology Project (which spent or wasted another \$1 million) were “birth presents”, and the abolished National Asian Languages (NALSAS) program⁷ was nourishment for Korean.

In line with these policy-based initiatives, the active past 18 years (1989 – 2006) of Korean language education in Australia can be characterized, though arbitrarily, largely into three phases: 1) the honeymoon period (1989 – 1995); 2) the adjustment period (1996 – 2002): and the fight-for-survival period 3) (2003 - ?). Individual institutions and programs may have slightly different beginnings (and endings), but they are mostly common in having been going through these similar phases at both secondary and tertiary levels. At the moment, secondary Korean programs in NSW and other states are suffering from various ongoing problems and most tertiary institutions are under enormous pressures.

3. Changes in governmental policies

We often say that ‘A crisis is an opportunity’, but we don’t give much attention to the opposite maxim: ‘An opportunity is a crisis.’ Is it too simplistic to say that the failure to utilize the great opportunities to systematically ‘plant’ and consolidate the programs

³ Authored by Joseph L. Bianco and endorsed by the Commonwealth Government of Australia.

⁴ Prepared by the Ministerial Working Party, NSW Department of Education.

⁵ *Asia in Australian Higher Education* authored by Professor John Ingleson.

⁶ *Australia and Northeast Asian Ascendancy* authored by Professor Ross Garnaut.

⁷ This program provided over \$200 million for nine years to support four—Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese and Korean—Asian languages and studies.

during the ‘honeymoon’ and ‘adjustment’ periods resulted in the current crisis or hardship? If the rise of Korean language programs came with governmental policies, it is also true that the struggle or hardship came with them as well. The policies that have affected the rise and fall of Korean had three types: 1) policies that directly relate to Korean; 2) policies that encompass Asian languages; and 3) policies that concern the secondary and higher education in general.

The recent notable policy changes include the abolishment of the National Asian Language (NALSAS) program at the end of 2002 and the Federal Government’s budget cut on higher education since 2003. If there was a single motive that controlled these decisions, it is what is called ‘economic rationalism’, and this controls various walks of life in the current Australian society including education. It has two constraining justifications: 1) ‘Every business should make ends meet’; 2) ‘The user pays.’ These justifications have given financial pressures to the management of universities and school authorities, which are then transmitted to individual programs often in the form of a reduction or abolishment of the program and accordingly a dismissal of redundant staff. The current difficulties facing Korean programs result directly or indirectly from this economic argument simply because Korean programs are relatively small, that is, hard low enrolments. It is paradoxical that programs initiated with economics suffer due to the economic rationalism.

4. Responses from the Korean language teaching communities

Wishful but skeptical – that’s the assessment of the Korean language teaching communities about possible support from the Australian Government.

- *The State government decided to provide students learning Russian with a full scholarship based on the trade relationship; shouldn’t we demand a similar support on the same ground?*
- *The Government emphasizes more than any other time the importance of Asian languages but there has been no support at a policy level.*
- *In my opinion, looking to the Australian government is a waste of time, precisely because there are far more pressing educational issues than whether or not people are studying Korean.*

As a response to the policy changes, the institutions teaching Korean have taken, individually or jointly, some measures for survival, which can be summarized in four: 1)

reshaping or redirecting the courses on offer; 2) introducing new courses targeting 'background' students; 3) community fund-raising and seeking funding assistance; and 4) sharing experiences and resource materials.

Over the past few years some institutions have reshaped or redirected their existing courses to be more attractive, turning them to utility-oriented or culture-related language courses that involve business communication, IT, TKFL, film and media. Though still too early to know for certain, the initial feedback is promising as far as enrolments are concerned, and so a couple of other institutions are also considering similar approaches.

Another step that was taken by some institutions was to introduce new courses (e.g. para-professional translation and interpreting) or redirect their existing courses to cater for background (or heritage) students and international Korean students on campus. In cities like Sydney and Brisbane where the population of the Korean community and international students is big or sizable, these courses have served a certain role that provides a kind of safety net.

Apart from these course-redirecting measures, there were some successful fund-raising or fund-seeking activities in Sydney. The Korean consultant position (in an adviser capacity for the high school programs), which was to be abolished due to funding cuts at the end of 2003, was reinstated with a joint funding assistance from the Sydney Korean community, the Korean Government and the NSW Department of Education. KAREC (Korea-Australasia Research Centre) based at UNSW was recently commissioned from the Academy of Korean Studies as a "regional hub" for Korean Studies-related activities in the region.

Lastly, in a recent conference in Sydney it was proposed that KSAA would investigate the feasibility to create an internet portal community where all the legitimate digital resources contributed by its members and each institution will be uploaded and stored for the purpose of sharing such resources. It was also proposed to invite practicing school teachers of Korean to its biennial or special conference where they can share their experiences (good or bad) with peer teachers and academics through pedagogy workshops. In addition, it was proposed to form a close network among States, among academics and teachers, and between teaching institutions and governmental agencies.

5. Reduction in high school Korean language program

Frustrated, cynical and desperate. It is extremely regretful to have reached a stage where such negative words should be employed to describe the high school programs. Here are some comments from academics:

- *Generally [the high school program] is going down. Korean enrolments must be increased in high schools, but we don't have any wonderful idea.*
- *Schools teaching Spanish and Chinese are increasing, while Korean is not growing.*
- *An increase would be wonderful, but it is not really feasible,...and students might be better off learning French or Chinese.*
- *I have known very few students who actually studied in high school (in fact, only one as far as I can remember!), and I do not know whether that reflects the lack of Korean language in high schools, the failure of such programs to inspire students to continue their study at the University level, or the great difficulty of the Korean language.*

Currently the high school Korean programs are going through probably the worst time since their introduction in the early 1990s. The situation was repeatedly warned by Shin (2001, 2002) some years earlier, but unfortunately it has become worse rather than better despite the joint funding effort as mentioned above. In NSW alone, the number of schools offering Korean is now reduced to five from twenty at its peak time in 1996. The HSC⁸ Korean courses were also cut to two (Continuers and Background Speakers courses) from five in 1990s. The worst blow was the decision to suspend the Beginners⁹ course from 2006 (accordingly there was no intake in Year 11). Further, I was shocked by the bad news that there was only one candidate for the HSC Beginners examination in 2006. Unfortunately, that's not all. I was also shocked by the news that all three schools teaching Korean in Victoria have decided to close down their Korean language programs at the end of 2006. This means that from 2007 there won't be any Victorian school that offers Korean for non-Korean students, and the only way to study Korean will be through the Saturday School of Community Languages where background students learn their 'heritage' language (i.e. Korean in this case). All these have happened very quickly and almost simultaneously! The situation in QLD is not much different. Students learning

⁸ Higher School Certificate course/examination. It is chosen in Year 11 and its external examination is taken in Year 12; an equivalent of the Korean *Swunung* examination. As far as I know, Australia was probably the first foreign country that included Korean in its regular curriculum in 1990, with the implementation of the course in 1993 and the first national examination for tertiary admission in 1994.

⁹ According to the Eligibility rule, 'non-Korean' students who have no background (both cultural and linguistic) in Korean are only eligible to take this course.

Korean and schools offering Korean are also decreasing in the State as well. Also, Korean in New Zealand high schools is not growing at all.

In the case of NSW, the only active Korean language programs are those offered through the Open High School which teaches a Continuers course¹⁰ by mainly using correspondence modes and through the government-run Saturday School of Community Languages. Even these programs, however, have a number of problems. The first drawback relates to the rigid and unfair Eligibility rule, which forcibly regulates that a student who has any Korean family background (including an interracial family) must enroll in the Background Speakers' course, regardless of their proficiency in Korean. But this course is really daunting and not suitable for the 2nd generation Koreans who speak very limited Korean, like formulaic kitchen language (e.g. *Em-ma, pay-ko-pha. Pap-cwe!*). To make it worse for them, more than eighty percent of the students who are enrolled in Background Speakers' course are international students (*yu-hak-sayng*) who came to Australia after dropping or even finishing their high school study in Korea. It is no wonder that willing local 'Kostralian' students are terribly discouraged and have no choice but give up Korean for fear that they would be greatly disadvantaged in competition with Korean L1 students. In the meantime, the Open High School program appears to be less attractive than face-to-face teaching with respect to, among other things, physical care and students' motivation.

As a small step to tackle these problems, the Korean Education Centre (attached to the Sydney Korean Consulate-General) has made some practical attempts, for example, replacing the phased-out Japanese program with Korean in one school, arranging sisterhood relationships between Australian schools and their Korean counterparts, and holding a dinner party for school principals. As a response to the decision to close the Korean programs in Victorian schools, it was proposed at a recent conference that KSAA should form an action group which will send a protest letter to the State's relevant authorities and personnel, expressing its deepest concern and support for Korean.

6. Relationship between Korean language and Korean studies

¹⁰ It is a course prepared for those students who have learned a language (i.e. Korean in this case) for 200-300 hours before Year 11.

Most academics in Australasian institutions agree that the relationship between Korean language courses and Korean culture-related courses is important so that they should be structured or integrated together in a 'Korean Studies' program.

- *I think that the relationship is very strong. Our students enrolling in Korean language are increasing, because of their interests in Korean pop culture. We offer two courses (Korean pop culture and Korean film), and the feedback is very good. In future, Korean politics (including North Korean issues) and economy courses would be more helpful.*
- *We have been teaching Korean cultural elements in Korean language courses and, Korean language and Hankul in Korean culture courses. We are now planning to teach the principles and historical backgrounds of Hankul in a new Alphabets in East Asian Culture course from 2007.*
- *If the relationship is strong, students can benefit from a proper integration of activities, and staff will have a better idea of their "target audience".*

We don't need to refer to an influential statement to know that language and culture are inseparable (Smolicz 1981b). This is particularly important in a foreign language teaching and learning, as the study of language is crucial in understanding another culture. In planning a 'Korean Studies' program, however, there are at least two issues to consider. The first one is the old argument that relates to the definition or identity of Korean Studies – what academic disciplines "Korean Studies" cover; and whether language should be separated from 'studies', etc. The second issue is a practical argument about whether we have a luxury to consolidate language and 'culture' into a separate major.

What is certain in Australasian tertiary environment is that, language courses are essential part of 'Korean Studies', and it is practically impossible to offer two separate full majors, Korean language major and Korean studies/'culture' major within a single institution, because of a number of practical reasons, such as low enrolments, relative lack of excellent scholarship, lack of managerial or financial support, and students' wish to combine language and 'culture' in their major, etc.

If there is a need to separate the two streams to focus on one discipline, we may have two options; 1) a complete separation: two different majors and 2) a partial separation (i.e. integration): language-focused major or 'culture-focused major. The first option is possible only if the particular institution meets the above-mentioned conditions such as large enrolments, a sufficient and excellent scholarship, managerial support and students' want. By offering a separate full language major or a full 'culture' major, students who

do not want or need to study the other major components can concentrate on their own major study not with general interest but with a genuine interest. One colleague put it this way:

- *In the past, there was a marked disparity between students studying language + studies courses (that is, Korean majors) and those simply studying “studies” courses. By and large, the performance of the major students in the studies courses was not as good those students studying out of interest, for the simple reason that the “Korean major” students **had to** study a “studies” subject. By contrast, many of the other students were studying out of a genuine interest—that is to say, not for multicultural or economic reasons.*

The second option is to structure the program for students to complete much greater language or ‘culture’ components depending on the students’ choice of focus (say, 80/20 or 70/30 ratio). In this option, the program will operate in such a way that one major focus is served by the other minor components but still in a complementary way. Most of Australasian universities choose this mode but their main focus has been on language. If individual institutions have needs to reverse the structure, they may do so, though it is quite odd to have such a structure in a languages school and requires a number of justifications (including an economic one).

7. The presence of local and international Koreans and its implications

NSW (Sydney) hosts the vast majority (roughly, over 80% or 80,000 including 40,000 non-permanent residents) of the Korean population, followed by QLD (Brisbane and Gold Coast), and then Victoria (Melbourne), while Koreans residing in other main cities (Canberra and Perth) are very small. The Korean migrants and international students are increasing in NZ and have settled mainly in Auckland. The distribution of Korean population has strategic relevance for Korean language education, especially for universities with a large number of ‘Korean’ students (both local and international).

- *I think that it is important to provide overseas Koreans with opportunities to fulfill their needs at universities. Through our recent survey, we were able to confirm the need to offer Korean for local Korean students and as a response we offered a new course in 2006, Korean for Heritage Speakers course, which attracted nearly 40 students. In future I think that universities offering Korean should develop courses helpful for local Korean resident students.*

- *[The] local society of Korean residents is strong, and extremely helpful in organising Korean culture-related events. Their presence therefore is of great importance to our teaching program.*

Two universities in Sydney have already offered a Background major stream or courses for background speakers, and some courses have been reasonably successful, while some others need to be redirected to meet students' needs and interests. Depending on the circumstance of individual institutions, courses targeting local or international Korean students can be organized as a separate major stream or part of an existing single major stream.

These background courses serve at least four purposes: 1) Background speakers have a legitimate right to study their heritage language as much as non-Korean students do (Taft and Cahill, 1989); 2) Background speaker students have certain needs to improve their Korean to be able to operate themselves in professional contexts; 3) The courses function as a basis for a stable operation of upper-level language courses and accordingly may assist the maintenance of the program; and 4) The presence of a sizable number of background speakers gives the course planning team an opportunity to broaden the range of language (and probably non-language) courses of applied or professional nature, which require an advanced or highly advanced level of proficiency.

But there are some dangers in running background courses or allowing background speaker students in a course which was designed primarily for non-background students. Firstly, there is a danger of 'Koreanizing' the whole program, i.e. Korean for Koreans. Secondly, there is a danger of downgrading the university foreign/second language degree program to a community language program. And thirdly, by doing so, there is a danger of discouraging willing non-Korean students from enrolling in Korean or giving relative disadvantages to them in the class and assessments. Similarly, a class filled dominantly with 'Asian' (largely Chinese-background) students thanks to the "Korean Wave" has a danger of 'Asianizing' the program, which may be a discouraging factor for willing non-Asian Caucasian Australian students. A similar comment was made by a colleague:

- *Based on my experience, I would say that for the long term, the presence of overseas Koreans will have a negligible impact or a negative impact inasmuch as Korean runs the risk of "ghetto"-ization. This is a very real danger for Korean in*

general. As a consequence, we must work towards attracting the best students, irrespective of background...

For secondary school programs, the presence of a sizable local Korean population in the community is a great opportunity to introduce Korean into the system. Take the case of NSW. If a minimum of 20 local Korean students from the same school begins to attend the government-run Saturday School of Community Languages (SSCL) from Year 7, it is possible for the Department to advise their home school to appoint a Korean teacher for them, though the principal should be convinced. If this happens, it is a great opportunity to bring Korean language into the public school system and increase the number of students learning Korean in public schools. We know that there are thousands of Korean heritage students of junior high school age (Year 7 and over) in the Korean community, but unfortunately most of them go to 'church schools' or *Hankul Hakkyo*, rather than the SSCL, partly because of the lack of awareness in the community and partly because of a group egoism of the churches to protect their own interests.

8. Conclusion

Korean language programs in Australian universities and schools are going through the toughest time since their introduction and it is likely there are more unstable years to come. The situation at some universities is a little better, but most institutions are struggling and the situation of high school programs is much worse. The key issue is low enrolments. Why low? I find that a number of key factors relate to the current crisis. Firstly, there has been no 'road map' to direct the strategies for the development of Korean language education in Australasia at both secondary and tertiary levels. Secondly, a large amount of financial resources were wasted or used unwisely for fancy projects such as Korean Through Technology, which disappeared after a project period without leaving any substantial outcome. Thirdly, there has been no influential leadership or 'controlling tower' to provide on-going advice and support to the Korean language community, and to take countermeasures effectively in various situations. Fourthly, too often, Korean in Australasia has been emphasized due to its 'economic importance' rather than educational value, leaving Korean programs exposed to all the 'sea changes' and

policy changes. And finally, despite the importance of Korea for Australia¹¹, Korea has always been underrepresented in Australia, and the status of Korean language and studies has never been matched with the economic and political relationship between the two countries.

To address these issues and problems and in order not to repeat the past mistakes, I conclude this paper with the following recommendations:

- 1) that the Korean Government or governmental agencies should make a policy provision that allows for the promotion and support for secondary Korean language education in foreign/Australasian countries;
- 2) that the Korea Foundation should consider the possible establishment of its branch office in Australia (ideally in Sydney) to carry out its role effectively in providing on-going advice, assistance and support for secondary and tertiary programs;
- 3) that KSAA should form an action group to prepare a short and long term road map that specifies feasible strategies to increase enrolments in Korean and advance Korean programs in Australasia, in consultation with local associations, Departments/agencies, Korean Government/agencies and experts (e.g. IAKLE);
- 4) that the large Korean corporate enterprises (e.g. Samsung, LG, Hyundai) which are successful in Australasian markets should be positively involved in upgrading the image of Korea among general public (e.g. not just a global image but also 'Korean image' through their promotion activities) and in developing Korean language and studies programs. Even one shout such as 'Korean Technology!' on television commercials will be greatly helpful for a change of the image of Korea;
- 5) that the future promotion of Korea or Korean language should not remain solely in economic relationships but more emphatically in people-to-people and cultural relationships that lead to an opportunity to develop a genuine interest in Korean;
- 6) that the local Korean communities (especially churches) should leave their vested interests behind and cooperate in efforts to promote Korean language programs

¹¹Korea is the third largest destination market for Australian exports and Australia's fourth largest trading partner. The trade profit has always been in favour of Australia as much as 3 : 1. And Korean tourists visiting Australasia and international students studying in various Australasian cities are huge and continuously increasing.

- through school systems by encouraging their students in *Hankul Hakkyo* to enroll in the government-run schools;
- 7) that course designers and teachers/professors alike should ensure that resource materials and class activities are intellectually stimulating and the study of Korean is interesting in and of itself; and,
 - 8) that academic research in Korean humanities should be more encouraged, promoted and supported, as such research creates interest in Korea and Korean people, which then lead interested people to the commencement of the study of language.

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