

SOAS-OKCHF Workshop on Korean collections in UK institutions

Hosted by the School of Arts at SOAS, University of London

Time: 18th November 2023, 10:30am-4:30pm

Location: Djam Lecture Theatre (DLT), SOAS Main Building

Itinerary

10:30 Registration, tea and coffee

11:00 Opening speech
Charlotte Horlyck (SOAS)

11:10 Presentation 1
Korean materials and artefacts collected since 1880 and preserved in Oxford
Minh Chung (Bodleian Library)

11:30 Presentation 2
Books from 1902 Korea: Provenance of Korean Rare books in Cambridge University Library
Seul Bi Lee (Cambridge University Library)

11:50 Presentation 3
Manuscripts, Printed Books and Maps from Korea in the British Library collection: resources and published research for materials collected 1843-1930
Beth McKillop (British Library)

12:10 Q&A 1

12:30 Lunch break

13:30 Presentation 4
Collecting Korea at the British Museum
Sangah Kim (British Museum)

13:50 Presentation 5
Interrogating Influence: Researching Korean collections at National Museums Scotland
Lauren Barnes (National Museum of Scotland)

14:10 Q&A 2

14:30 Tea and coffee break

15:00 Presentation 6
A history of Korean collections at Ker Gardens, Economic Botany collection
Erin Messenger and Gayathri Anand (Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew)

15:20 Presentation 7

Korean Dolls Collected by Annie Howe Jordan at the Pitt Rivers Museum
Lina Sinhwa Koo (University of Brighton)

15:40 Presentation 8

Diplomats, Missionaries, and Businessmen: Early Collectors of Korean Objects in the UK
Jess Son (SOAS)

16:00 Q&A 3

16:20 Closing remarks Charlotte Horlyck (SOAS)

Introduction

This workshop forms part of an OKCHF-funded SOAS School of Arts research project, *The Korean art collecting activities of British diplomats, businessmen and missionaries, 1880-1930 — A provenance research project based on UK collections.*

PI: Dr. Charlotte Horlyck
Researcher: Jess Son

This project aims to further the understanding of early collecting and consumption of Korean cultural objects in the UK by investigating objects that entered British museum collections between the 1880s and 1930s, having been donated, sold, or bequeathed by British individuals who lived, worked and/or travelled in Korea during this time. Focusing on diplomats, businessmen and missionaries who for various reasons had connections with Korea, the project brings to light the types of objects that were acquired by individuals whose collecting practices tended to be driven by other factors than connoisseurly interests.

The research is focused on eleven influential diplomats, businessmen and missionaries who had intimate connections to and experience in Korea and who donated, sold and/or bequeathed more than three-hundred objects to British institutions. By incorporating a wide range of objects and institutions that fall within and outside the domain of art, the project also provides important insight into how Korea was understood by diplomats, businessmen and missionaries and it offers fresh understandings of how institutional approaches to the objects furthered contemporary perceptions of Korea.

Artefacts associated with this group of individuals number over four-hundred pieces of various types, medium, and date, and they range from typical art objects, such as ceramics, to printed material and botanical specimens, among others. Their type and medium dictate the institution they entered, whether it be museums, libraries, or research centres, with artefacts acquired by a single individual at times being spread across several institutions. In some cases, an individual's collection was dispersed across several institutions, while at other times an institution would reject specific objects, only for them to be acquired later by another institution. To date no in-depth research has been undertaken on the cross-institutional relationship between early acquisitions of Korean art in the UK, and the project will therefore fill an important gap in this area.

The project entailed on-site research of early Korean collections spread across a total of nine UK institutions. In today's workshop, curators, librarians, and academics from the Bodleian Library, Cambridge University Library, British Library, British Museum, National Museums Scotland, Kew, Royal Botanic Gardens, Brighton University, and SOAS, University of London, will be sharing their expert knowledge on the Korean collections of their respective institutions. We hope that this

workshop will be the first of many opportunities for professionals and academics to share knowledge on the Korean collections here in the UK.

The School of Arts at SOAS, University of London would like to express our deepest gratitude to the presenters from these nine institutions and the Overseas Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation, who have made this workshop possible.

Presentation Abstracts

11:10 Presentation 1

Korean materials and artefacts collected since 1880 and preserved in Oxford
Minh Chung (Bodleian Library)

During the period of the opening of Korea to the west from the 1880s, diplomats, businessmen, missionaries, and travellers began to visit the country. Through them many interesting things (artefacts, manuscripts, books, photographs, etc.) were brought back and found their way to private collections, museums, and libraries. These give us a glance into what Korea was like during this important period. Oxford is very fortunate to be home for many of these things brought back from Korea. This talk looks at acquisitions from four main categories: gifts from Missionaries, Diplomats, and Individuals and Purchases from individuals, collectors, and auction houses. Some items are exceedingly rare and highly prized for their historical value.

11:30 Presentation 2

Books from 1902 Korea: Provenance of Korean Rare books in Cambridge University Library
Seul Bi Lee (Cambridge University Library)

The provenance of the 70 Korean books at Cambridge University, acquired on July 1, 1902, was largely unknown. However, the letter from Miss Lucy Nevile in the Library Archive has provided us with valuable information about the route through which these books were obtained. The letter indicates that Cambridge University made a procurement request, and in response, Miss Lucy Nevile who was working for the Anglican mission with sisters, sent numerous books from Korea to the library. She acquired books from various sources, including a Korean bookshop and different missionaries in Korea, with the guidance of other missionaries specialised in the area, such as J.S. Gale. Therefore, the books she sent to the University of Cambridge in 1902 were of different types, content, and from various Christian groups - such as Catholic and Anglican missions, as well as the Korean Religion Tract Society, which published for the Methodist and Presbyterian missions. Each of the books is not only a valuable resource showing details of missionary publications at that time, but together as a set, they also provide a meaningful holistic depiction to reading life then Korea and active effort for publication from various demotions.

11:50 Presentation 3

Manuscripts, Printed Books and Maps from Korea in the British Library collection: resources and published research for materials collected 1843-1930
Beth McKillop (British Library)

The British Library holds an eclectic collection of pre-modern Korean books. From the first document -reflecting missionary ambitions to convert Koreans to Catholicism - through legal, cartographic, Confucian, Buddhist, literary and historical texts, the former British Museum Library aspired to add Korean materials to its 'universal' library. Today's presentation (hampered by the current cyber-emergency which has closed off all British Library digital systems since the end of October 2023)

presents existing resources for researchers, and has been produced with the kind help of Hamish Todd, British Library Head of East Asian Collections who regrets being unable to join the workshop.

13:30 Presentation 4

Collecting Korea at the British Museum

Sangah Kim (British Museum)

Since its opening in 1753, the British Museum has expanded its collection through donations and purchases. The size and quality of the Museum's Korean collection, which comprises more than 4,000 objects, is owed to collectors as well as curators' efforts. This talk will look into several important moments in the history of the Korean collection at the British Museum and discuss how the collection was shaped.

13:50 Presentation 5

Interrogating Influence: Researching Korean collections at National Museums Scotland

Lauren Barnes (National Museum of Scotland)

There are almost 1000 Korean objects in the collections of National Museums Scotland (NMS), yet research into this varied collection has previously focused on the early stages of collections development and on the materiality of the objects within the collection. Current collections research at NMS is instead led by the insights provided by collections data analysis and this has raised questions of the influence that donors and sellers have had on the collections as well as the significance of the broader contexts of collecting and collections formation. This work-in-progress paper presents some of the preliminary findings from the current Korean collections research and argues that by recentring collecting histories research on the broader contexts of collecting, this enables the museum to critically re-evaluate the version of Korea that is constructed through the museum's collection as well as shape a way forward for Korean collecting, display and research.

15:00 Presentation 6

A history of Korean collections at Ker Gardens, Economic Botany collection

Erin Messenger and Gayathri Anand (Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew)

The Economic Botany Collection (EBC) is a biocultural collection within the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew that houses plant-based specimens and objects from all over the world. With a focus on the EBC's range of Korean material culture, this paper explores its origins through key donors and the historical collecting contexts. It will highlight examples from within the collections and their provenance before linking back to contemporary stakeholders, and how day-to-day collections management and documentation practices are implicated in the accessibility of Korean collections within Kew's EBC.

15:20 Presentation 7

Korean Dolls Collected by Annie Howe Jordan at the Pitt Rivers Museum

Lina Sinhwa Koo (University of Brighton)

Korean dolls in the collection of the Pitt Rivers Museum at the University of Oxford were collected by Lady Annie Howe Jordan (1849-1939), whose husband, Sir John Newell Jordan (1852-1925), was a British diplomat. The couple moved to Seoul, Korea, in 1896 as Sir Jordan was appointed as the consul general of Korea. It is likely that the dolls were acquired while they lived in Korea between 1896 and 1905. According to the museum record, the dolls were donated to the museum by Lady Dorothea Hosie (1885-1959) in 1953, who had extensive knowledge and experience in China. Although there is limited information about how Lady Jordan purchased the doll objects and how

Lady Hosie came to receive the objects and donate them to the museum, the trajectories of the objects held by multiple owners shed light on the dolls' changing values and meanings across different times and spaces. Tracing the collectors' activities in Korea, this paper aims to not only find important information about the objects but also investigate the experiences of various stakeholders, including foreigners, local makers and Korean people who were portrayed in dolls in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Korea.

15:40 Presentation 8

Diplomats, Missionaries, and Businessmen: Early Collectors of Korean Objects in the UK

Jess Son (SOAS)

From 2022, the School of Arts at SOAS, University of London and the Overseas Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation has embarked on a one-year provenance research project on Korean cultural objects in UK institutions. This project aims to further the understanding of early collecting and consumption of Korean cultural objects in the UK, and the consequent representation of Korea in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by investigating collectors who had meaningful connections to Korea and the objects in their collections. The project entailed surveys and analyses of collecting activities of eleven prominent diplomats, missionaries, and businessmen who helped form early Korean collections in nine major UK museums and libraries from the 1880s to the 1920s, and the nature of their collections. The total number of objects collected and bequeathed by these individuals amount to over 400 and warrant further contextual research in examining their impact in the construction of Korean national identity and image in the UK and in Europe.

Thank you for attending our workshop. If you have any constructive feedback or outstanding queries regarding our project, please contact Jess Son at js132@soas.ac.uk