

Editor's Introduction: South Korean Technical Aid and Scientific Cooperation*

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Popular images associated with South Korea's economic resurgence following the Korean War tend to be associated with the period of Park Chung-hee (1961-1979), and especially, with the late 1960s and early 1970s. Among the images that might be cited here are the Gyeongbu Expressway (1968-1970) and the various projects linked with the Korean shipping and steel industries, including POSCO, in the southeast, both of which emerged around this time.² Even as it covers some of this familiar ground, the intent here, is slightly different, a special issue of *IJKH* offering two papers on South Korea, and one on North Korea. The aim here is to shift attention to the entire peninsula, and along with that revised emphasis, to a related set of questions concerning engagement with external partners and neighbors, focusing on questions of scientific and technical aid, along with scientific diplomacy. As with economics, there is an existing narrative for these concerns, but it tends to come much later, especially with the democratic transition of the late 1980s.

For Korean science and technical aid, the historiography is domi-

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** Jeon Chihyung. "A road to modernization and unification: the construction of the Gyeongbu highway in South Korea." *Technology and Culture* 51, no. 1 (2010): 55-79. See also Song Sung Soo. "The historical development of technological capabilities in Korean steel industry: The Case of POSCO," *Han'gukkwahaksa-hakhoeji* 33, no. 2 (2011): 317-334.

nated by the relationship with the United States, and its role in assisting with the post-*haebang* and post-Korean War set of circumstances via aid. Prior to the creation of USAID (United States Agency for International Development) in 1961, South Korea was one of the world's single largest recipients of multilateral aid, and for the US specifically, the target of a succession of aid organizations (1949-1961). Along with South Vietnam, the nation represented a major focus in crafting a "Free World Asia," a region characterized by its military strength, some form of authoritarian rule, and a claim to economic liberalization and growth, here encompassing large portions of East and Southeast Asia.. This US-centered narrative provides a set of answers based largely on the American diplomatic literature, but it fails to account for a different set of transitions, one coming with the end of Japanese empire, and the creation of new opportunities for Koreans to explore their own choices.

If South and North Korea declared independence as of 1948, the two nations owed a great deal of their regional ties to a shared, prior history, whether via Joseon diplomatic relations, or through more recent imperial connections. For Japan, historians have used the term "transwar" to hint at developments both preceding, and also extending beyond 1945, indicating that the Showa period (1926-1989) did not simply stop and make a dramatic transition midstream. This point proves useful for the Korean context as well, indicating that scientific cooperation, material practice, and knowledge practice share a similar character, exceeding the perceived 1945 boundary. In immediate terms, the break-up of the peninsula's infrastructure (rail, electric grid, access to natural resources) meant that South Korea, the agrarian and light industry partner, needed to locate replacements for its loss of access. In turn, the North Koreans would need to augment their food supply, although subsidies from China and the Soviet Union would provide support.

Two of the papers here take up the theme of South Korea seeking to restore or augment its relations with neighbors or partners through

these emerging kinds of knowledge diplomacy. From the early 1960s, the nation sought to strengthen its relations with partners, some expected, and others quite surprising, recognizing the need to satisfy a diverse range of problems. During the era of decolonization, post-colonial countries found themselves wielding an unexpected power within the United Nations, meaning that they could vote to support, or alternatively, withdraw their favor, from neighbors in a similar situation. The competition between the two Koreas was therefore not simply about symbolic legitimacy, but also about gaining political recognition, an aim accomplished through the accumulation of new “friends.” Newly decolonized nations often found themselves receiving two requests, with each asking for unique recognition of “one” Korea, and denial of the “other” Korea. Similar forms of competition occurred with other divided nations: East and West Germany, and North and South Vietnam.

Jaehwan Hyun’s research challenges the commonly held belief that South Korean ornithology emerged in the 1960s largely due to US aid. Instead, Hyun focuses on the transnational interactions between Japanese, North Korean, and South Korean biologists, who were often connected through family ties. According to Hyun, these scientists pursued their own distinct goals, sometimes collaborating with each other and at other times working independently. Through their interactions, ornithological research networks in Asia were reshaped, and Korean ornithology became recognized as an international field. In another kind of network story, Junho Jung looks at the programs targeting post-colonial Africa as of 1964 and following, as the “Korea problem” in the United Nations meant an acute need for rapid diplomatic recognition. This activity took the form of medical diplomacy, where doctors and nurses were dispatched to partner nations.

The remaining paper extends these themes across time, and also, to encompass North Korea. Sulim Kim examines North Korea and its architectural practices following the destruction of the Korean War. As with the South Korean counterparts, North Korean actors found them-

selves with the challenge of negotiating between their personal ambitions and the desire of the state to craft a particular kind of built environment, and while receiving external aid. In this case, the combined themes of knowledge practice and partnerships continue, complicating existing narratives.

As a whole, these three papers seek to challenge the dominance of an American-centered narrative, shifting the emphasis to Korean actors, and to their partners, who came from a range of sites, both regional and further abroad. In temporal terms, much of this activity took place earlier than the existing literature, and particularly in the early to mid-1960s, with rebuilding stages from the Korean War very much in play. In turn, this means far more contingency, both for North and South Korea, and also in terms of their heated competition with one another. It was by no means apparent at this time that South Korea might someday “win” the diplomatic and economic battle, nor that North Korea would lose some of the dynamism it demonstrated early on, particularly when it had numerous external partners, and was able to receive loans in the international arena. We thank IJKH for allowing us the opportunity to pursue these common themes, which allow us to suggest a greater freedom of play, a counterfactual world, one which holds relevance for northeast Asia, as well as for other post-colonial sites.