

## Digital reunification of dispersed collections: The National Library of Korea digitization project

**Jaesun LEE**

Library Services Department, National Library of Korea, Seoul, Rep. of Korea.

E-mail address: jaesunlee@korea.kr



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### Abstract:

*The National Library of Korea is undergoing a project of examining, collecting and digitizing Korea-related materials located overseas so as to establish a Korean Studies research information infrastructure and preserve a cultural heritage to be passed on to the future generation.*

*The NLK is undertaking a project of examining and collecting ancient Korean materials located in outside countries. The purpose of this project is to examine and create facsimiles of ancient Korean materials of which only one copy is preserved and also other valuable materials. The collected ancient materials are available domestically and internationally through the Korean Old and Rare Collection Information System (KORCIS).*

*The NLK's projects are not limited to examining and collecting Korea-related materials located overseas. The NLK is providing detailed descriptions of the content, form, printing type and value of the collected materials to the Korean people and to Korean Studies research institutions and researchers around the world so as to contribute in laying the groundwork for and developing Korean Studies as well as promoting the excellence of Korea-related materials.*

**Keywords:** facsimileing, digitization, digital facsimileing project, collections abroad

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### 1. Introduction

Korea has a unique culture, with its own alphabet and language. During its 5,000 years of history, Korea had to endure several invasions. Koreans emigrated to China, Russia and the U.S. in the 1860s to overcome poverty, and again in the 1900s to be liberated from Japan's invasion. Meanwhile, major western countries interested in the so-called "Land of the Morning Calm" collected many Korean old books and cultural properties.

The joy of liberating from Japanese rule and in 1948, establishing a modern country did not last long as the Korean War broke out in 1950 which left a deep scar on the consequently divided Korean Peninsula, and now Korea is under an armistice since 1953. Soldiers from 54 countries participated in the Korean War as part of the United Nations Forces. Through these historical events, materials illustrating Korea's modern culture were left in many countries throughout the world.

Even in the post-war situation in which economic growth was given top priority, the National Library of Korea realized the importance of Korean materials dispersed abroad and began to investigate the whereabouts of these materials and collect facsimiles of them in 1982. Korea had established four major national stacks deep in the mountainside to preserve important national materials, but many collections were lost during wars. As a result there were not enough primary materials necessary for research on modern and contemporary Korea, and thus Korean materials held overseas and foreign books on Korea were treated to be important. In order to overcome such situation, the NLK investigated and discovered Korean materials held abroad and collected them to provide to Korean Studies researchers. Furthermore, the NLK is pursuing a preservation and digitization project for Korean materials held overseas in order to hand them down as a cultural heritage to the future generation. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to share the digital reunification process of national documents through collecting and utilizing Korean materials held abroad, and proposing international cooperation regarding said process.

## **2. The digitization project at the National Library of Korea**

The National Library of Korea was established in 1945 and procured a legal basis for introducing the legal deposit system by means of the enactment of the Library Act in 1963. In 1965, the Library Act entered into effect, and thus collecting deposit copies began. In 2015, the NLK became a library holding 10 million books. Major collections owned by the NLK include old books from Asia, research on Korea during the end of the Joseon Dynasty, Korean Studies-related materials, textbooks and dissertations that amount to a total of 270,000 books, being Korea's largest collection.

The NLK has preservation stacks for the permanent preservation of its collections, but materials published prior to the 1980s have begun to deteriorate due to acidification. For the preservation of its collections, the NLK began a digitization project in 1996 that targeted valuable books, old books, materials on the Japanese Government-General of Korea and books damaged due to acidification. As of the end of 2015, 135 million pages in 500,000 books have been digitized, accounting for about 20% of the entire target collection. The NLK launched a national digital library in 1997. The digital library is centered on the NLK's own full-text DB, and six institutions that have the largest digital full-text DBs in Korea are participating. Libraries and the publishing industry have agreed that the distribution period of a publication sold in bookstores would be considered to expire after five years since its publication date, and then the NLK would be able to digitize the publication for the purpose of preservation based on the Library Act in which a relevant article for said purpose was

provided. The copyrights of 150,000 digitized materials have expired while several of the digitized materials' copyrights are still valid. The NLK constructed a digital library building on its premises in order to promote the active use of digitized materials. The digital library has computers with devices for paying royalty when using digitized materials attached to them, and facilities for reading, printing, editing and processing digitized materials. Also, libraries under a digitized material use agreement with the NLK can designate a computer on their premises and register the IP address of the computer so that users can use digitized materials at the libraries.

In 2009, the NLK started the OAK (Open Access Korea) project and contributed to introducing open access to researchers and promoting the sharing of research results through the open access repository. As of May 2016, 25 academic associations are participating, and 390,000 journal articles in the repository are being provided through the open access portal. Also, the NLK has a digital preservation project for web resources through which 850,000 major web materials and 150,000 websites are being preserved. Additionally, the NLK is adopting a digital facsimile method for collecting materials overseas.

### **3. Range of Korean materials held overseas created into facsimiles**

Some Korean materials held overseas are old books, materials created by Korean immigrants in foreign countries and materials on Korea created by foreigners. Among such materials, there are two types that are given priority in terms of facsimileing.

First are materials held abroad that were originally published in Korea but are no longer available in Korea. These materials include old books, maps and documents. In terms of the reference time period, Korean old books are defined as those that were published before the year 1910. Books during this period were bound in a unique way, so their shape is obviously different. The major characteristics of the binding are that the books were bound using a needle and red thread, and the letters are vertically written from right to left. Such format is similar to Chinese and Japanese old books, but close examination shows that the texture of the paper, the color of the thread, and the number of holes made using the needle are different. Moreover, although Chinese characters were used before the creation of the Korean alphabet *Hangul* in 1443, the way these characters are interpreted is different from that in Chinese. But because of these similarities, Korean old books held abroad are often treated to be Chinese or Japanese old books.

Second are materials on modern and contemporary Korea that function as primary materials for research. Most of them are hard bound using the modern method and include records such as government documents. These materials deal with issues relating to Korea, were published overseas in Korea or are translations. Strictly speaking, although these materials are related to Korea, they are actually not Korean materials. But since not many materials from the modern times and before exist due to their loss during war, these "Korea-related materials" are being facsimiled to be used as important basic materials for research on Korea. Major examples include materials on the Japanese Government-General of Korea, the period when Korea was

under Japanese rule and the Korean War, and especially records on Korea, including North Korea, in documents created by the U.S. government, monographs on Korea issued by publishers, articles on Korea in the U.S. media and reports on Korea presented in academia or research institutes.

#### **4. Digital facsimileing of Korean old documents held overseas**

The first task for facsimileing overseas Korean old documents is locating materials that are not available in Korea but are in other countries. The first step is to investigate Korean materials that are domestically available. Also, the value of the materials and the content, scale and different versions, even if available in Korea, must be examined, and the Korean Old and Rare Collection Information System operated by the NLK is useful for this process. Furthermore, in 1969 the NLK established an old book committee which advises on discovering and collecting materials.

In order to select materials for facsimileing, collections of various libraries, Korean Studies research materials and bibliographies are examined, and online lists of libraries or union catalogs such as WorldCat are used.

When such basic investigation is completed, a list of materials for examination is sent to the overseas institutions owning them, along with a request to visit the institutions to examine the materials. Matters such as the examination schedule, providing the materials from stacks, and enquires on local facsimileing companies are agreed upon beforehand as well. The number of curators and their duration of stay at the material-holding library are determined based on the scale and properties of the materials. An MOU may be signed between the two libraries as necessary.

Under such process, the first library visited by the NLK Korean material investigation team was the Bibliothèque nationale de France and the The National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilizations in 1982. From 1983 to 2000, realia in Japanese libraries were mostly examined. Since then the NLK is broadening the scope of institutions to include libraries and museums in Europe and the U.S.

Korean old books held abroad are mostly in good condition thanks to the excellent properties of traditional Korean paper called *hanji*. However, old documents or maps are usually more damaged than old books, so these must undergo preservation or conservation treatment before being digitized.

Regarding old maps, since 2007 to 2015, the NLK has been collaborating with the Geography and Map Division of the United States Library of Congress to restore and digitize old Korean maps. Based on an agreement between the two parties to cooperate on restoring old Korean maps, 43 items (including 15 books and 108 maps) such as the “Yeojido” and “Donggukjido” maps held by the Library of Congress have been restored and preserved. The restored maps have also been digitized and are now available on the NLK and Library of Congress websites.

Regarding the facsimile method, from 1990 to 2005, materials were copied on paper or microfilm, and since 2006, a widespread digitization technology is used to create digital files. The copied films or digital files are shared with the institution holding the originals. As of 2015, the number of facsimiled Korean old books and documents are 4,532 titles and 14,524 books from 44 institutions in nine countries. Among them, 1,713 titles and 4,345 books were produced in digital file format.

## **5. Digital facsimileing of materials related to modern and contemporary Korea held overseas**

Foreign materials on modern Korea are held mostly in the U.S. The U.S. performed a considerable amount of investigation on the Joseon Dynasty's geography, sea route and culture even before the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1871. Furthermore, after the Korean ports were open for trade in 1883, not only the U.S. government but also private organizations, missionaries, businessmen, soldiers, merchants and others from the private sector collected and systematically managed and preserved much information on Korea. Materials on Korea in various areas such as politics, economy, culture and education were broadly gathered especially before and after the Korean War (1950-1953). The collected materials are preserved in the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library, Harvard University Library, Presidential Libraries & Museums, and Protestant missionaries.

Since 2004, based on requests from Korean researchers, the NLK has been collecting Korea-related documents among public documents and collections created by the U.S. government that are stored by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). These materials are provided as primary materials for research on the political situation of Korea in the modern and contemporary eras and relationships with neighboring countries.

Major materials collected from NARA are civil documents from the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service and the Foreign Economy Office, documents before and after the period of Japanese colonial rule and the Korean War, and various records from the Office of War Information from the National Archives Collection of Foreign Records Seized that were collected during World War II and the Korean War. A local expert is hired for the facsimileing process in order to effectively examine materials including documents and photos.

As of 2015, 2.3 million pages from 48 record groups have been digitized and organized based on the classification method for and technical rules applying to records collected overseas. Considering their characteristics, records collected from abroad are organized in the order of: record group, series, file and item, and a full-text database is being established per file. The database is accessible through the NLK website, and materials are searchable by keyword, topic and record group. ([http://www.nl.go.kr/nl/dataSearch/archives\\_intro.jsp](http://www.nl.go.kr/nl/dataSearch/archives_intro.jsp))

The NLK is also producing and providing secondary content based on the primary materials held by NARA, thereby contributing to facilitating research on Korean modern and contemporary history, and is organically cooperating with domestic institutions collecting

overseas materials. The gathered materials are not only provided to relevant institutions and researchers but also introduced to the public through exhibitions at the NLK.

Also, from 2010 to 2013, the East Rock Institute digitized 8,800 pages materials on Korean immigrant families held by major libraries in the U.S.

## **6. Digital reunification and service of dispersed collections**

The NLK has visited 42 overseas institutions to examine and collect Korean old documents since 1982. Making visits overseas is not an easy task, and in many cases seeing the original documents is difficult since they are too fragile. Therefore, a system by which the original images can be viewed should be established.

In 2004, as the scale of digitized materials increased, the NLK established the Korean Old and Rare Collection Information System (KORCIS; [www.nl.go.kr/korcis](http://www.nl.go.kr/korcis)) for easily searching old books. Korean old books from home and abroad are all gathered in the system. Before the digitization project was initiated, a collection of catalogs was issued and shared that had brief bibliographic information on materials that were facsimiled on paper or microfilm, but in order to use the materials, each catalog had to be searched, and there were inconveniences in viewing the facsimiled versions.

Such inconveniences were eliminated in KORCIS, and a digital Korean old document collection that could be used anywhere with an internet connection was created. Furthermore, the new system enabled foreign institutions to use old books in Korea.

As of May 2016, 60 domestic institutions such as the Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies and 37 overseas institutions such as the Tokyo University library are participating in KORCIS, and as of the end of 2015, 450,000 bibliographic data and 40,000 full-text data are being serviced. The number of old and rare collections scattered throughout Korea is estimated to be about 2.23 million books of 1 million titles. The NLK is planning to digitize 570,000 more items, other than the already digitized 430,000. The NLK is also acting as the secretariat of the Korean Association for the Preservation of Old Books since 2016 and is working to provide a standard for organizing old and rare collections.

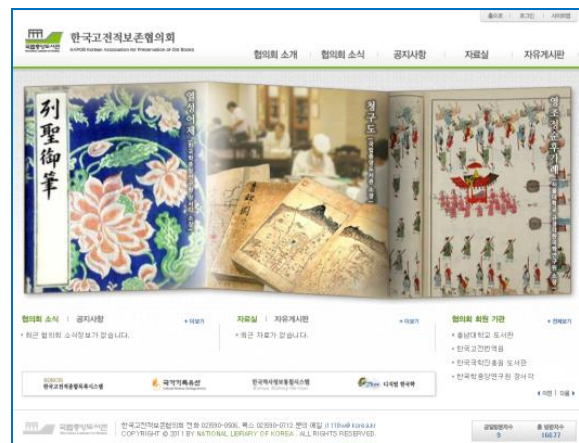
Bibliographic data for Korean old books comprises information on the title, author, edition, publication, physical description and general information. Essential items to be included are: first, regarding the first page of the first volume, the title, cover illustration, preface, table of contents, legend and citations; second, regarding the body, the first title of the first part of the body, volume number, collective title, signature, attribution, ownership stamp and illustrations; and third, regarding the explicit, supplements, appendices, records on the author and publisher, epilogue, rubric and records on publication. As such, to provide a standard for organizing Korean old books and to ensure consistency in organizing materials, the Korean Association for the Preservation of Old Books (KAPOB) is hosting an annual meeting and strengthening cooperation in this area. Furthermore, a Korean old books workshop is hosted

overseas (in Toronto, Canada in 2012 and Paris, France in 2016) in order to enhance the capabilities of persons in charge of organizing Korean old and rare collections in overseas institutions. Moreover, the NLK is providing training on using Korean materials including old books to increase overseas librarians' capabilities for providing relevant services through an annual workshop for librarians in charge of Korean Studies-related materials in foreign libraries.

The NLK is also publishing a catalog collection including a report with descriptions and image information of the facsimiled materials based on the examined materials in order to widely promote the facsimiled materials. Furthermore, in order to promote the use of Korean old books and documents, the NLK has annotated 6,864 items (22,500 items are estimated to be annotated in total.) from 2003 up to now, and is providing a catalog search option for these items.



[Figure 1] KORCIS website



[Figure 2] KAPOB website

## 7. Conclusion

In order to see the effects of an efficiently accomplished facsimileing process, all the Korean materials held in overseas institutions must be located, and strategic cooperation with domestic institutions undergoing similar projects is necessary in order to prevent unnecessary spending of the budget and overlap and re-examination of materials.

Since 2004 the NLK has been operating the Korean Association for the Preservation of Old Books and is cooperating with the Overseas Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation—a private non-profit organization—to efficiently process with the facsimile project. Consultations on old books or documents owned by individuals, temples and families are provided daily. Moreover, a Korean old books workshop is provided for staff in overseas institutions in charge of Korean Studies-related materials, and also, the NLK is participating in the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies. Through such domestic and international cooperation, the NLK is supporting the organizing of Korean old books and facilitating the standardization of data. Furthermore, at the end of 2016, the NLK cooperated with the OCLC

and provided bibliographic and authority data to WorldCat, VIAF and ISNI in order to support the wide use of data on Korean materials throughout the world.

Last of all, below are issues to consider that came up during the process of the facsimile project and proposals to IFLA on this topic.

- a) A facsimile project for materials held abroad requires a detailed plan for collecting and using the materials from the very beginning when materials are investigated. Accurate information on the current status of materials and methods for accessing and collecting resources is necessary.
- b) An MOU or other means for mutual cooperation on examining lists and actual materials, dispatching experts, facsimileing methods, costs, etc. between the institution holding the materials and the institution collecting the materials should be established in order to provide support so that operations proceed smoothly.
- c) In order to increase the use of materials, technical developments in establishing a DB and sharing the materials is necessary, and a cooperative system for sharing standardization methods between relevant institutions is needed.
- d) An organization is necessary that is responsible for taking the bibliographic data of several countries on old books and documents that are held overseas and developing this data into usable content, thereby enabling the international use thereof.

In this context, I would like to propose that a website be opened by IFLA on which, based on the philosophies of UBC and UAP, materials that are published in languages other than the native language of the member institution that holds them can be shared. A library exists to provide all the materials held thereby to be used by patrons. IFLA established UBC and UAP—its core projects—to realize such philosophy of libraries. Recently, IFLA has continued to take innovative steps through the National Bibliography guideline, FRBR family and ICP. However, all of these projects are based on the sharing of materials published in the native languages of institutions, and thus the sharing of materials published in different languages is still difficult to achieve. Therefore, a framework is necessary that enables at least IFLA members to share materials written in a certain language with the national library of the country whose native language is that certain language, and to cooperate in creating bibliographic information as necessary. I believe this will become possible with the cooperation of the National Libraries Section and the Rare Books and Special Collections Section. The purpose of this proposal is to prevent delays in academic research due to valuable materials not being discovered for use.

## References

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