

Program for Evolving Humanities and Sociology

Research Visit Report

Personal Information

Name: Lee Ji Young (PhD. Student, Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology, The University of Tokyo)

Major: Cultural Resources Studies

Research Topic

"The national plays" of the first half of the 1940s in South Korea

Research Location

Country: America

City: Boston

Institute: Harvard University Yenching Library

Research Period

21st Sep 2012 ~ 8th Oct 2012 (17days)

Plans and Outcomes

(1) Overview of Plans

The object of my study is to examine the bare facts on the performances of the "The national plays" (1940~1945) in Korea, which was then a Japanese Colony. I have been trying to dig up not only the historical responsibility of these plays but also their secondary meanings, and to evaluate them from theatrical and cultural historical perspectives.

Recently a Korean researcher found many of "The national play" scripts, which had been missing even in South Korea, in the Harvard University Yenching Library in the United States. Therefore, I planned this research visit with an aim to examine those original scripts myself.

(2) What I Achieved

There I was able to identify 18 scripts as those of "The national plays" performed in Korea under Japanese rule. I also found and collected more information about these plays and some other theater related material from 1939 - 1955. These are quite valuable because most of them are classified and not open to the public in South Korean libraries. Moreover, an unexpected finding was that the Yenching Library has a large number of theatrical scripts and books from North Korea, and from them I mainly picked up the ones published around the time when Korea was divided. The tools I used to collect those data were a photocopier, a digital camera, and an image data scanner.

Through an interview with Ms. Mikyung Kang, a librarian for the Korean collection of the

Yenching Library, it came to light that the library came to possess the "The national play" scripts in May 1968. Unfortunately, however, I could not find any clues about why and how those scripts were collected in South Korea and taken to the United States.

Finally, since "The national plays" were performed during a time when censorship was strict, I looked for traces of mandatory alterations in the original scripts. There were some hints, but at this point I am not quite sure whether or not the alterations were coerced.

On the whole, the initial objectives of this research visit were fulfilled. By examining the scripts with my own eyes, I have been getting one-step closer to the actual conditions of the Korean theatrical world at the time.

(3) Plans for further research

Using the precious and various data collected through this research visit, I intend to continue examining the actual conditions of "The national plays" in colonized Korea. Especially, since there are apparently some signs of censorship in the originals, I would like to examine them further as well as to investigate how the Korean theater plays of those days were affected by such censorship.

As mentioned earlier, I unexpectedly ran into old theater-related material from North Korea, and my plan is to analyze them and determine whether they express their views on "The national plays".

In this way, I might be able to understand the conditions of those days both from the South Korean and North Korean side.