Korean wave reaches Oxford

In November, events related to Korea abounded in Oxford.

On 6 November, a literary event featured the celebrated poet Ko Un who gave a poetry reading in Korean in the Haldane Room, Wolfson College, with Brother Anthony (Korean name An Son-jae, Emeritus Professor from Sogang University) interpreting and reading in English. The event was very well attended by leading literary scholars in Oxford. There was a wine reception followed by a dinner afterwards. This was one of the events regularly organised and hosted by Dr James Lewis, University Lecturer in Korean History.

Photos courtesy of Thomas Quartermain.

Ko Un (right) with Brother Anthony (Left)

Ko Un with Dr. Jieun Kiaer, Young Bin Min-Korea Foundation University Lecturer in Korean Language and Linguistics
On 7 November, the pop star Psy (real name Park Jae-sang) delivered a speech to the Oxford Union - the famous and prestigious debating society where many well-known politicians were “trained”. It was founded in 1823 and has a long history of hosting famous figures from Sir Winston Churchill, Dalai Lama, and Mother Teresa, to Michael Jackson. Psy commented on the fame of his “Gangnam style” video and gave a demonstration of his famous horse dance. Many in the audience joined in.

Photo courtesy of Jonathan Dunbar, Oxford Union.

On an official level, on 22 November, four groups of high-level Korean visitors from the Ministry of Knowledge Economy visited the University and the Bodleian Library. During their visit to the Bodleian Library, they were greeted by the Deputy Librarian Richard Ovenden and were shown rare Korean treasures.

Bodleian Deputy Librarian Richard Ovenden (centre), Professor Jong-min Kim (far right), and Professor Guy Houlsby (far left).
Photo courtesy of Minh Chung.
Another earlier official visit was on 10 May when there was a delegation led by Dr Chang-gyu Hwang who is the National Chief Technology Officer (CTO) and Head of the Office of Strategic R&D Planning in the Ministry of Knowledge Economy in the government of the Republic of Korea. For more details please visit the following webpage: http://www.eng.ox.ac.uk/public-relations/news/national-cto-of-the-korean-government-and-former-ceo-of-samsung-visits-oxford

On 27 November, his Excellency Park Suk-hwan, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the United Kingdom, visited the University and also the Bodleian Library. He was greeted by the Vice-Chancellor and his schedule included tours of the Institute of Biomedical Engineering, a tour of the Bodleian Library, and of certain Oxford colleges. During his tour of the Bodleian Library, the Ambassador was shown the Shakespeare 15th folio, as well as rare Korean treasures. For more information about collaboration between Korea and the University, please visit: http://www.ox.ac.uk/international/oxford_around_the_globe/asia_east/korea_.html

There have been also other events throughout the year, notably the Festival Owon (Festival of Korean Music, Art and Culture in Oxford) presented by the North Wall Arts Centre over three days 2 – 4 July at three venues: Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, The North Wall Arts Centre, and Jacqueline du Pré Hall, St Hilda’s College. People in Oxford were able to enjoy Korean music, tea ceremonies, calligraphy, and ceramics presented by well-known Korean artists.
The more important events for the Library included the visit on 29 August to the Bodleian Library by a group of nine Korean researchers and professors from the Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies, Seoul National University. They spent long hours examining the Korean materials in the Special Collection. Much was gained from their special knowledge regarding these materials. They were also interested in the digitising of the Korean Special Collection. The other important event was the arrival of 114 cartons of books (approximately 3000 volumes) on 16 November 2012 from the National Library of Korea as part of the “Window on Korea” project. This is the largest donation of books so far given to Korean Studies at Oxford and will be housed in the Korean Studies Library recently created with the sponsorship of the National Library of Korea.

Photo courtesy of Angela Arnold (Bodleian Library).

Earlier this year, in March 2012, Dr. Jong-min Kim, former Senior Vice-President with the Samsung Advanced Institute of Technology, was appointed Professor of Electrical Engineering in the Department of Engineering Science. For more information, please visit: http://www.eng.ox.ac.uk/public-relations/media/literature/Newsletter-2012-2013.pdf page 9.
The number of students coming to Oxford University from Korea is also rising steadily over the years.

2011/12    144 (South Korea)
2010/11    134 (South Korea) + 4 (North Korea)
2009/10    132 (South Korea)
2008/9     125 (South Korea)
2007/8     111 (South Korea) + 6 (North Korea)
2006/7     95 (South Korea) + 12 (North Korea)

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Over the past year, there have been big development in Korean Studies and resources and the presence of Korea in Oxford continues to be strong.