

A Short History of the Ups and Downs of Korean Studies in Latin America: Newcomers Meeting the Challenges

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Abstract

This article traces the challenges of developing Korean Studies in Latin America from the late twentieth century to the present. Latin America is a relatively needy but enthusiastic newcomer facing significant obstacles in the field of Korean Studies. Among the thirty-three countries in Latin America, active and passive Korean Studies-related activities can be found in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, and Mexico. Korean Studies in Latin America vary in each country, but can generally be described as social science-based intermittent studies and activities that almost totally depend on Korean government support. South Korea's dramatic economic development and some sources of funding from Korea have led to the creation of several significant academic activities in Latin America. Latin American scholars' interests cover a wide range of regions including China, Japan, and (to a lesser extent) Korea. Most of these scholars dedicate their academic research to general Asian Studies and employ a comparative focus as a means of relating their research to the situations of their own countries. Despite difficulties of language and geographic distance, Korean Studies in Latin America has been making its own way, though it is developing at a little slower and weaker pace than in other regions of the world. Even so recent interest in social science-based research continues to be "sown" by and found among more than a few scholarly pioneers' hard work and publications.

Keywords: Korean Studies in Latin America, a humanistic approach to Korean Studies, Latin America, Korean Studies introductory textbook in Spanish, area studies, Asian Studies

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Introduction

Latin America is a relatively needy but enthusiastic newcomer facing significant challenges in the field of Korean Studies. Since 1964, when the first general Asia-related course was offered by Argentinian professor Vicente Fantone of the National University of Buenos Aires, Argentina, Korean Studies slowly began appearing in several Central and South American countries. But Latin America remains far behind Asia, Europe, and North America, where Korean Studies have long been established as independent curricular fields of departmental status and where scholars of Korean descent and/or foreign scholars who speak Korean are in charge of Korean Studies. Of course, in Latin America, Korean Studies vary in each country, but they can generally be described as social science-based intermittent studies and activities that almost totally depend on Korean government support. Most courses and/or Korean Studies-related activities are launched with financial support from the Korean government, mainly the Korea Foundation and the Academy of Korean Studies, and tend to end when the support ends due to a lack of local financial sources to continue such programs. Furthermore, very few Latin American scholars and students have the chance to take systematic Korean Studies courses. In fact, most Latin American Korean Studies-related academics are classified by their departments as Asian Studies-related scholars instead of Koreanists. Why is this so? Perhaps because Korean Studies does not exist as a separate discipline in the Latin American academy. Korean Studies are mostly subsumed within broader East Asian Studies programs or centers, which in general do not make divisions between independent disciplines.

Nevertheless, South Korea's dramatic economic development and some sources of funding from Korea have led to the creation of several significant academic activities in Latin America. The Latin American Association of Korean Studies,¹ the Argentinian Association of Korean Studies, the Brazilian Association of Korean Studies, and the Mexican Association of Korean Studies were all organized with the support of the Korea Foundation in response to strong recommendations from local Korean embassies.

El Colegio de México was the first and only institution to establish an independent Korean Studies Department for graduate students in 1994. The National University of Buenos Aires ran a Korean Studies Center (2005 to 2013) and the University of Sao Paulo started its Department of Korean Studies in 2013. The Pontifical Catholic University of Chile has organized an annual essay contest on Korean Studies for its undergraduates since 2007 and an annual International Conference on Korean Studies since 2008. It publishes compilations based on the conference (on a biannual

basis) and the essay contest (quadrennial), among other publications. All these activities fundamentally depend on Korea Foundation support. Recently, the Korean Studies Promotion Service (KSPS) and the Center for International Affairs (CEFIA), both centers of the Academy of Korean Studies, started to support Argentinian, Costa Rican, Chilean, and Mexican universities.²

One of the primary concerns regarding Korean Studies in Latin America is to determine whether the aim of Korean Studies should be to promote Korea, to create a national brand image, to encourage and foster Korean Studies scholars, or to encompass all of these goals. Objective observation is required in order to be able to describe the position or role of Korean Studies in any specific Latin American university and it is arguable to talk about any school being founded based on research trends.

This article focuses on recent developments of Korean Studies in Latin America including the strengths and weakness of the academic field, to determine the key challenges that must be overcome to strengthen Korean Studies in the region. Developments from the late twentieth century to the present will be traced to the extent possible considering the limited time and space given me for this study. Existing journal papers, books, and media publications related to Korean Studies published by Latin American scholars will be summarized to estimate the potential academic development of Korean Studies in the region for the future.³

Development

Among the thirty-three countries in Latin America (total population of 588.0 million), twenty speak Spanish as their official language, and Brazil, the biggest country in Latin America, speaks Portuguese. Active and passive Korean Studies-related activities are found in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, and Mexico. In alphabetical order according to country, the Korean Studies situations in these countries will be described and their notable scholars identified. Each country's total population and number of Korean inhabitants will also be provided in parentheses in order to foster understanding of certain demographic differences among these countries.⁴

Argentina (41.45 million/22,580)

The Argentinian Association of Korean Studies organized its first National Conference

in 2005, which was held annually until 2012; in 2014 it became biannual. These national conferences were held at the National University of Rosario (2005), National University of La Plata (2006), National University of Tucumán (2007), El Salvador University (2008), National University of Córdoba (2009), National University of Comahue (2010), National University of Buenos Aires (2011), and National University of Mar del Plata (2012). Among nine conferences, six produced publications (Oviedo 2005; Di Masi and Crisconio 2006; Alé 2009; Santarrosa and Duarte 2010; Trinchieri 2011; Mera and Iadevito 2012). A total of 116 undergraduate students and professors are named as authors of the articles published in these nine volumes. There are no publications from the fourth, eighth, and ninth conferences.

The National University of Buenos Aires hosted the first Latin American Conference on Korean Studies in 2003 with Korea Foundation support. The late Jaime Silbert from the National University of Córdoba, the late Jorge Di Masi from the National University of La Plata, and Carolina Mera from the National University of Buenos Aires were the main actors of these conferences.

Both Jaime Silbert and Jorge Di Masi's topics were international affairs and political issues of the Korean peninsula. Silbert published numerous articles on Northeast Asia including Korea, and edited books on the Korean economy, society, politics, and international relations issues (North Korea-related issues included). He also translated Bruce Cumings' book *Korea's Place in the Sun* (Cumings 1997) into Spanish (Silbert and Park 2004). Jorge Santarrosa and Gustavo Santillán are Silbert's disciples, but since Silbert's death have not been very active in conducting Korean Studies-related research.

Jorge Di Masi focused more on project activities than academic research and launched the Korean Studies Center at his university in 1995. The National University of La Plata organized the sixth Latin American Conference on Korean Studies in 2013. Currently, Bárbara Bavoleo works at the National University of La Plata in charge of Korean Studies and her main area of research is the relationship between the Internet and presidential elections in South Korea. She earned her doctorate at the National University of Buenos Aires in 2007 with a thesis on the same topic.

Carolina Mera, an anthropologist who did her DEA at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes in France in the 1990s on Korean immigrants in Buenos Aires, has been the director of the Korean Studies Center of the National University of Buenos Aires since 2005. Currently this center has almost stopped its activities due to internal and external problems and its reduced Korea Foundation grant. Korean immigrants have been a popular topic in Argentina for a while due to her influence and the significant number

of Koreans living in Argentina (Tucumán, Rosario, Córdoba, Neuquén, etc.).

Mirta Bialogorski, from the José Hernández Popular Art Museum, also conducted several studies on Chinese Koreans in Argentina. Corina Courtis, from the National University of Buenos Aires, wrote her doctorate thesis on Korean immigrants in Argentina and has continued to develop her research on the topic. Liliana García Darís, from El Salvador University, has written several articles on Korean religion and women, but her main area of interest is more Japan than Korea. Among young scholars, María del Pilar Álvarez focused her doctorate thesis on Korean film at the National University of Buenos Aires in 2014. She works at El Salvador University and her research interests include Korean history and politics, postcolonial theoretical debates, and historical memory and human rights.

Brazil (200.4 million/49,511)

During the 1990s, the intermittent Korean language education courses that were offered in different universities depended on Korean government financial support. The Pontificia Universidade Católica de São Paulo organized the third Latin American Conference on Korean Studies in 2007 with support from the Korea Foundation.

Guimaraes (2009) undertook a review of the Korean Studies-related publications produced in Brazil between 1966 and 2007 and found nineteen books, fifteen book chapters, seventeen doctoral dissertations, thirty-nine periodical articles (online and print), twenty-two master's theses, six working papers, seventy-one papers presented, and thirty-one graduation papers. Almost 50 percent of the publications dealt with economics and 22 percent with international relations and politics. He concluded that most of the doctoral dissertations about Korea were produced by students from the University of Sao Paulo (hereafter USP), State University of Campinas, University of Brasilia, and Catholic University of Sao Paulo. Guimaraes states that, "As a result of economic and political modernization Asia is today an important international actor [and] source of technology and innovation, and has reached a privileged position in international trade" (3).

In 2013, the USP opened its Department of Korean Language. The USP has held an annual Korean language essay contest and conference for presentation of the top six or seven winning essays since 2012. Considering the fact that more than 40 percent of the Korean immigrants in Latin America are living in Brazil (about 20 percent in Argentina), it is logical to establish Korean language as an independent area of study at

the university. However, not much academic research has come out of the university yet. The main concern of Yun Jung Im, USP's Korean language professor, is translation of Korean literature into Portuguese, though she predicts that there will be more publications about Korean immigrants in Brazil in the near future (Im 2013).

Chile (17.6 million/2,575)

Though Korean Studies in Chile started somewhat later than in other Latin American countries, it has nonetheless seen significant progress in terms of development. The University of Chile carried out several Korea-related research projects from the late 1990s to the early 2000s at its graduate school of international relations with support from the Korea Foundation. However, after Hernán Gutiérrez, who was the chief researcher, left the school to take a position with Chile's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the research activities subsided. The Korean Studies Division was formally launched at the University of Chile in 2006 with Korea Foundation support; it organized the fourth Latin American Conference on Korean Studies in 2009. But the division's activities ended when the program director, Martín Pérez Le-Fort, left Chile in 2012.

The first Chilean university to offer a Korean language course as part of its regular cultural studies was the Navy's Universidad Marítima de Chile (2004 to 2005), but the course was eventually suspended due to a change in the university's administration. The Pontifical Catholic University of Valparaíso also offered Korean language and culture courses from 2004 to 2011.

At present, the Chilean university with the most systematic development of its Asian Studies Program, including Korean Studies, is the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile (hereafter PUC). Recognizing how few scholars there were in Korean Studies in Latin America, including Chile, programs began to focus on undergraduate students from 2006 when Korea Foundation grants were received by this university. The three main activities are teaching, research, and outreach. The Asian Studies Center of the Faculty of History, Geography and Political Science has been offering new courses such as Korean History and Culture, Comparative Culture between Korea and Latin America, and Women in Korean History as minor courses (as of 2015), depending on student demand and the university's needs and circumstances. Korea Foundation Project Director Wonjung Min, who has a doctorate in Latin American literature, has conducted research on a variety of topics, individually and jointly, to develop Korean Studies. Topics include intercultural communication between Korea and Chile as

part of Latin America, cultural hybridization and identity formation of Korea, Korean popular culture, and the impact of history education focusing on post-unification inter-Korean intercultural communication.

Since 2008 seven annual International Conferences on Korean Studies have been held at PUC. Selected papers presented at the first six conferences were published in 2010, 2012, and 2014, respectively, and these include the following titles: *Korea an interdisciplinary vision* [Corea una vision interdisciplinaria]; *Korea a multidisciplinary approach* [Corea un acercamiento multidisciplinario]; and *A humanistic approach to Korean Studies* [Un acercamiento humanista a los studios coreanos]. The book *Korea an interdisciplinary vision* (Min 2010) includes a selection of papers presented at the first and second International Conferences on Korean Studies held at the university in 2008 and 2009, respectively. This book is the first of its kind published in Chile. Political scientist Cassandra Sweet from the PUC wrote the following review of the book.

The collection *Korea an interdisciplinary vision*, edited by Wonjung Min, is true to its title, bringing together a wide spectrum of disciplinary fields to examine modern South Korea. For many academic experts, whose scholarship stays within sharply defined specializations, the book may provoke an opportunity to contextualize their work within a larger community of research on the Korean Peninsula. For beginners studying Asia, the collection may offer a broad introduction into some of the primary areas of study regarding modern South Korea. . . . In combining a tri-continental group of authors (Chile, Korea and the United States) from multiple fields, the work reaches its aim of providing a multidisciplinary collection. . . . How can works from different areas all covering Korea speak to each other in a way which brings about an improved holistic understanding of the Korean Republic today? Hopefully these are questions which can be explored more fully in future collections. In the meantime, the efforts to bring together this diverse group should be lauded. (2011, 259-261)

Korea a multidisciplinary approach (Min 2012) contains a selection of papers presented at the third and fourth International Conferences on Korean Studies held in 2010 and 2011, respectively. This volume continues to raise awareness on the importance of interdisciplinary studies and multidisciplinary approaches through twelve articles written by fifteen authors from Korea, the United States, Chile, Mexico, and Argentina. Four different topics are covered in the volume: Northeast Asian relations, the meaningfulness of Korean film, the current status of Korea, and

Chile–Korea relations. *A humanistic approach to Korean Studies* (Min 2014), the third volume of the International Conference on Korean Studies, contains selected papers presented at the fifth and sixth conferences. Sixteen authors from Canada, Chile, Mexico, South Korea, Spain, and the United States cover four main topics: linguistic and literary appreciations of the two Koreas, sociological and intercultural gaze on the Korean peninsula, anthropological and historical perspectives on Korea, and political and economic reflections on Korea. The International Conference on Korean Studies established the International Committee in 2011 which includes invited academics as well as PUC professors and the International Editorial Committee in 2012 for peer review of presented papers to be included in the conference volume.

The Korean Studies essay contest, which started in 2007, is held annually for the university's undergraduate students. The winning essays of the first four years of the competition were published in 2011 in a volume called *Sowing, Germinating and Blossoming: Young Chileans' Eyes on Korea* [Sembrar, germinar y florecer: jóvenes chilenos mirando a Corea] (Min 2011). Most of the contest winners had acquired a minor in Asian Studies at the university and/or had enrolled in Korean Studies-related courses. The volume contains twelve of sixteen winning essays, and the essays are divided into three main topics reflecting the book's title: *Sowing* ("Korean Shamanism and Korean Alphabet"), *Germinating* ("Korea: the World and Chile"), and *Blossoming* ("Korean music, literature and film"). The second volume is expected to be published in 2015.

Another interesting activity is the "Post-unification Simulation," a role play carried out on the hypothetical assumption that the two Koreas have been unified into one (Min 2014b). The activity began in 2010 in my Korean History and Culture course and led the students to discussion of issues about Korea, including the Six Party Talks and the UN, at the end of the semester, after they had acquired some knowledge about Korean history. In 2011, this activity was included in the fourth International Conference on Korean Studies as a junior panel discussion in which selected students participated.

The first Korean Studies introductory textbook in Spanish is expected to be published in 2015 by the Ediciones UC of the PUC (financed by the Academy of Korean Studies Seed Program for Korean Studies). This textbook is meaningful as it is the first aimed at meeting the needs of Spanish-speaking students of Korean Studies. The contents were developed by six Korean Latin Americanists and a Korean linguist, who all teach in different universities in Chile and Korea. The text was designed to reflect the authors' critical, comparative, and interdisciplinary pedagogical approaches

and stimulate Spanish-speaking students' interests in Korean Studies.

In Santiago academics at a variety of private and public universities have been expressing their perspectives on Korean topics. At the PUC Danilo Santos, with Pía Gutiérrez from the University of Adolfo Ibáñez, has written several articles on Korean films. Economists José Díaz and Rodrigo Fuentes, political scientists Roberto Durán, Anthony Pezzola, and Alfredo Reheren, and education professor Eugenio Rodríguez have been producing intermittent works on economics and public policy, international relations, and education. The University of Diego Portales opened a Sejong Institute in its Asia Pacific Center in 2012. The University of Santiago in 2014 launched a Korean Studies Center Program with support from the Academy of Korean Studies, but this university has done little on Korea to date. Verónica Neghme, former diplomat and executive director of the Pacific Studies Center of the Gabriela Mistral University, has worked to broaden Chilean students' general interest in Asia. Since Gabriela Mistral University closed the center (opened from 1982 to 2014), she has been lecturing about Asia in general at the University of Diego Portales, but not at the Asia Pacific Center.

Colombia (48.32 million/890) & Cuba (11.27 million/ data not available)

The Sergio Arboleda University in Bogota, Colombia organized the fifth Latin American Conference on Korean Studies in 2011. However, not much academic research has been undertaken yet. Recent interest in Korean language education is emerging in Cuba.

Mexico (122.3 million/11,364)

Alfredo Romero Castillo from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (hereafter UNAM) was the first Korean national scholarship beneficiary (1967 to 1970) in Latin America. His research topics focus on the general issues of international relations of China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.

As mentioned before, El Colegio de México (hereafter COLMEX) opened its Korean Studies Department from 1994 to the early 2000s under the Korea Foundation Professorship Program. The first generation was in 1994, and the second, in 1997, when Asia Pacific Studies was included as part of the department's master's

program. The Korean Studies major was reopened in 2000 and was renewed every two years until 2007, when COLMEX closed it. The Korean Studies major reappeared in 2011 for just one generation, after which it was closed once again due to internal problems. COLMEX organized the second Latin American Conference on Korean Studies in 2005. The first Mexican Association of Korean Studies was organized by the local Korean Embassy at COLMEX with support of the Korea Foundation in 2008.

COLMEX publishes its own journal called *Estudios de Asia y Africa*, which was launched in 1966. The original name of this journal was *Estudios Orientales*, and it was later changed to the current name. When I researched the publications produced by Spanish-speaking scholars in 2004 (Min 2004), almost all publications about Korean Studies were published in this journal. During the years 2012 to 2015, ten volumes were published, but just one article among those volumes deals with the Korean economy.

Currently, the political scientist José Luis León from the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Xochimilco, sociologist Enrique Valencia from the University of Guadalajara, economist Renato Balderrama from the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León (hereafter UANL), and political scientist Juan Felipe López de Aymes from the UNAM, who worked at COLMEX, are the main players in the field of Korean Studies in Mexico.

José Luis León is organizing the seventh Latin American Conference on Korean Studies to be held in October 2015. His research interests include South and North Korea, China, and Japan. He was a diplomat before becoming a professor. In 2009 he edited the book, *A Short History of Korea* [Historia mínima de Corea] (León Manríquez 2009) in which Silvia Seligson, Alfredo Romero Castilla, Juan Felipe López de Aymes, and Alejandro Escalona Agüero contributed their translations and summaries of Korean history texts based on earlier existing sources.

Enrique Valencia has authored several books and articles related to Mexican and South Korean economic and social policy issues, including the South Korean health insurance system. He has been a consultant for various international organizations such as BIDINDES, UNESCO, UNICEF, and PNUD. The University of Guadalajara has published the journal *México y la Cuenca del Pacífico* since 1998. During the years 2012 and 2015, eleven volumes were published, but only two articles among these volumes deal with Korean issues. Most of the articles are about China and Asia in general.

The main research area for Renato Balderrama, a social scientist, is China's economy as related to Mexico such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). He is

currently in charge of the KF e-School Program for Latin America and is running the Sejong Institute at the UANL.

Juan Felipe López Aymes earned his master's degree in Korea in 1998 and doctorate in England in 2007 on the topic of South Korean political economy. He was a research professor at COLMEX from 2007 to 2013 until COLMEX decided to close its Korean Studies program. He worked at the Asian Studies Center of the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León in 2014 and is currently working as a researcher at the Multidisciplinary Regional Research Center of the UNAM.

Economist José Estrada from the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana and sociologist Samuel Velarde from the Instituto Tecnológico de Ciudad Juárez also contribute to Korean Studies in Mexico. With the support of the Academy of Korean Studies, Nayarit University opened an undergraduate program in Korean Studies in 2014, with particular focus on the Korean language education program that was launched previously (in 2008). The professor in charge of Korean language education at both Nayarit University and the Tepic Sejong Institute is Sang Cheol Yun.

The University of Colima operates the Centro de Estudios e Investigaciones sobre la Cuenca del Pacífico (CUEICP) and the Centro de Estudios APEC (CEAPEC). Since 1990 it has published its own journal, *Portes: Revista Mexicana sobre la Cuenca del Pacífico* (prior to 2006 it was called *Aportes*). From 2012 to 2014, six volumes were published, among which six articles on Korea appeared.

Key Challenges

All of this brings us full circle back to the question: What is Latin America? Latin America is a region of the Americas that comprises countries where the Romance languages are spoken, primarily Spanish and Portuguese, but also French. Ibero-America comprises the countries in the Americas that are former European colonies of the Iberian Peninsula, Portugal, and Spain. Geographically Mexico belongs to North America but culturally to Latin America and Ibero-America. Mexico is between North and Central American countries' borders. South America is a continent located to some extent in the western hemisphere, but mostly in the southern hemisphere. Among Latin American countries, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela belong to South America. Strictly speaking, so-called "Latin America" is Ibero-America, but the term Latin America is generally accepted. Differences between the mestizo cultures that dominated Central

America and European cultures that dominated South America are noticeable. Between Spanish-speaking Latin America and Portuguese-speaking Brazil, there are important differences in size and languages. For example, the newly started KF e-School Program for Latin America is not feasible for Brazil because of the different language.

Since Latin America is usually understood as one entity, the cases I touch on below were less successful than expected. From 2006 to 2011, the UCLA Center for Korean Studies conducted the Academy of Korean Studies Laboratory Program for Korean Studies to establish a network among Korean specialists at UCLA and universities in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico. A series of activities were undertaken, such as joint research, visiting scholars, and scholarships for students to take “winter quarter,” among others. The administrators and participants of the program faced many challenges along the way, forcing them to recognize, at its conclusion, Latin America as too huge and diverse a continent to be considered and treated as a single country. Korean Studies in Latin America, they realized, required the development of specialized and more appropriate strategies. This program therefore ended and the Academy of Korean Studies began to support individual Latin American universities and/or individual researchers’ projects instead of the previous UCLA-Latin America consortium.

Another unsuccessful case is the KF e-School Program, which began in 2011 under the UCLA-Latin America consortium with two courses offered in English in one Argentinian and two Mexican universities. The professors were all from UCLA. In 2012, three courses were taught in one Argentinian and two Mexican universities. In 2013 and 2014, five courses in English and one course in Spanish (professor unknown) were taught in one Argentinian, one Brazilian, and two Mexican universities.⁵ After this e-learning experience, UCLA, Latin American universities, and the Korea Foundation understood more clearly the cultural and linguistic barriers and the inefficiency and difficulties related to differences in time and academic systems. Therefore, the Korea Foundation changed the system, so that beginning in 2015 (January 26 to May 26) Renato Balderrama was placed in charge of the KF e-School Program for Latin America in which Spanish-speaking Korean and Latin American professors teach courses only in Spanish on topics such as Korean Pop Culture, Economic Development and Corporations in Korea and East Asia, Korean History, and Commercial and Economic Relations between Korea and Latin America. The effects of the language change were immediately evident, particularly in terms of enrollment numbers. The courses are open to both credit and non-credit students.

Participating professors are Wonho Kim (Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, South Korea), Wonjung Min (Pontifical Catholic University of Chile), María del Pilar Álvarez (El Salvador University, Argentina), Juan Felipe López Aymes (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), Silvia Seligson (INAH National Museum of Culture, Mexico), Alfredo Romero Castilla (UNAM) and José Luis León Manríquez (Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Xochimilco). The Korean Pop Culture course has seventy-eight students from seventeen universities across five countries; the Economic Development and Corporations in Korea and East Asia course has 117 students from fifteen universities across four countries; the Korean History course has fifty-four students from twelve universities across three countries; and the Economic Relations between Korea and Latin America course has sixty-two students from eighteen universities across three countries. The participating countries include Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Mexico. Of course, the program has much to improve, but the experience is worthwhile because future efforts and results can be expected to continue.

Even though a kind of association of Korean Studies may be organized according to local embassy recommendations, the initiative and willing cooperation of local scholars are fundamental in order to be able to continue Korean Studies programs when support dries up. Attention must be paid to the Latin American Association of Asia and Africa (ALADAA), which has a 40-year history. This association was organized by Latin American scholars and is operated on membership fees. When ALADAA confronts financial difficulties, it looks for Asian countries' support, and though the academic level is still in need of greater development, it has nonetheless continued until today. The fifteenth International Conference of ALADAA will be held in January 2016 in Santiago, Chile. Korean Studies are rarely seen in ALADAA.

The Korean Wave is another issue. Korean media have reported good news about the huge successes of South Korean popular culture in Latin America, suggesting that people in Korea strongly connect such success to the national image, and furthermore to any activities related to Korea, including Korean language education and Korean Studies. Certainly several K-Pop idol stars are famous among specific groups and the number of Korean language learners has been increasing in Latin America due to popular music fans. Sejong Institutes have been established in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Mexico in universities or in Korean Cultural Centers. However, I believe it is unwise to relate this fandom to academic interest in Korean studies because it is uncommon to see Korean language students' interest develop into academic pursuits.

As mentioned earlier, Latin American scholars' interests cover a wide range of regions including China, Japan, and Korea. They commonly focus their academic research on general Asian Studies with a comparative focus that allows them to relate their findings to their own countries. For Latin American scholars, an integrated history of China, Japan, and Korea must be easier to understand since no systematic Asian-regional studies exist in Latin America where the influence of European history education obliges professors "to teach about the whole continent [of Europe] whether they specialize in Spain or Latvia" (Lipman, Molony and Robinson 2012, 11) due to their experience of Spanish and Portuguese colonization.

Certainly there is a lack of systematic education in efforts for Korean Studies, but why do Korean Studies-related activities stop when grants end? Also, the lack of Koreanists generates unnecessary competition among Latin American universities and scholars due to the struggle to obtain financial resources and the consequent obsession to satisfy the requirements of Korean governmental funding institutions, which produce and distort the reality of establishing the "first department," or the "first center," or the "first association." The Latin American bureaucracy makes it very difficult to establish Korean Studies as an independent area of study and, as mentioned earlier, when dedicated centers or associations are established, they often close due to internal and external problems, along with the difficulty of providing matching funds in response to financial support from Korean governmental institutions. The desire to satisfy internal and external requirements for funding sometimes leads to creative name-building such as "center-program."

In spite of the overall difficulties, however, Korean Studies in Latin America has been making its own way. Though there is a lack of schools or similar academic movements, topics nonetheless are being diversified. Culture, religion, inter-Korea relations, intercultural relations between Korea and Latin America, democracy, economics, education, modernization, society, financial crisis, commercial integration, immigrants, and Confucianism have been the topics mainly dealt with in Korean Studies-related conferences held in Latin America. However, Korean identity, North Korea, and Korean films have been emerging as attractive issues to Latin American scholars (Velarde 2015). The interests of Latin American scholars and students in relation to Asia and/or Asian Studies, including Korea and/or Korean Studies, vary greatly depending on the country. Chile's interest consists basically of commercial goals, while Peru and Brazil may have significantly greater cultural interest due to their numerous Asian community populations. Although the field of Korean Studies in Latin America is developing at a little slower and weaker pace than in other regions,

the recent interest in social science-based research continues to be “sown” by and found among more than a few scholarly pioneers’ hard work and publications.

Notes

1. The Latin American Association of Korean Studies has organized six conferences on Korean Studies to date which were held biannually at the following universities: I Encuentro de Estudios Coreanos en América Latina (2003), University of Buenos Aires, Argentina; II Encuentro de Estudios Coreanos (2005), El Colegio de México; III Encuentro de Estudios Coreanos en América Latina (2007), Universidad de Sao Paulo, Brazil; IV Encuentro de Estudios Coreanos en América Latina (2009), University of Chile; V Encuentro de Estudios Coreanos (2011), Sergio Arboleda University, Bogota, Colombia; VI Encuentro de Estudios Coreanos (2013), National University of La Plata, Argentina.
2. For more information, see the following links: <http://www.ikorea.ac.kr/english/> and <http://ksps.aks.ac.kr/hpjsp/hmpeng/>.
3. I thank Bárbara Bavoleo (Argentina), Antonio Menezes and Yun Jung Im (Brazil), and Juan Felipe López de Aymes (Mexico) who have generously helped in my data collection by re-ponding to emails and chat interviews. Since Latin America is a vast continent, some data might be missing. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to apologize to those who are not included in this paper. I would appreciate being informed of the missing information in order to be able to include it in future research.
4. Data as of 2013 and retrieved from the World Bank website: <http://data.worldbank.org/region/LAC>. Interestingly, the World Bank excludes Chile from Latin America and the Caribbean since Chile is the first South American country to join the OECD (in 2010). The populations of Korean inhabitants were retrieved from the Overseas Korean Foundation website: <http://www.okf.or.kr/portal/OkfMainView.do>
5. For more information see: <http://www.kf.or.kr/?menuno=144>.

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