Medieval European Studies in Korea Today

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1. The Middle Ages in the Korean university

Starting on a negative note, in the great majority of Korean universities medieval topics are thought to be too challenging for the undergraduate students. As a result, there are few or no courses in specifically pre-modern topics offered in them. In the English Departments of a certain number of universities, the literature of the medieval period as a whole, or Chaucer alone, is introduced during general survey courses: Introduction to Literature, Readings in Literature, or History of English Literature. This depends on the interest of the professor teaching the course.

However a small number of universities, perhaps five or six, offer a much more positive picture. Seoul National University offers the most fully developed coverage of medieval topics by the largest number of specialists. The English
Language and Literature Department currently has two medieval specialists among its faculty, one mainly focussing on Chaucer, among other topics, the other on Malory and the romances, especially. Others, while specializing in early modern literature, also have an interest in things medieval. One or more medieval English literature topic is usually offered each semester. Old English is taught within the framework of History of English courses. At least one member of the History Department of SNU specializes in Western European medieval history. Members of the French and German Departments sometimes teach medieval literature and at least parts of their courses involve the study of original texts. Medieval philosophy is taught in the Philosophy Department there, and there are regular courses for students from such departments wishing to learn Latin. In the absence of full-time faculty, qualified specialists teach medieval-related courses as part-time lecturers. In all these departments, doctoral dissertations on medieval topics are produced at least occasionally. In addition to regular courses, graduates teaching in a number of universities and current doctoral candidates meet regularly to conduct informal study of aspects of medieval literature in theoretical and interdisciplinary ways.¹)

Among the other universities, Yonsei University has a significant number of medieval specialists. Its English Language and Literature Department also has two professors whose main area of interest is the Middle Ages; one specializing more in Old English and Chaucer, the other especially in Langland and the romances, etc. Both introduce students to the earliest works in their original Old English language. The medieval period seems not to receive specialist coverage in Yonsei’s History Department, but a professor in its Philosophy Department, now retired, long specialized in medieval philosophy, especially Aquinas. He

¹) Information provided some years ago by Professor Jongsook Lee, English Department, SNU.
has encouraged his students to share his interest, producing a number of graduates who have written doctoral dissertations on medieval topics and this has led to the establishment of a nascent study center in medieval philosophy, although it has yet to undertake regular activities.

The other universities which have developed a serious coverage of the early periods include Korea University and Sogang University, the English Departments of both of which have specialists (actual or retired) in medieval or early modern literature who teach regular undergraduate as well as graduate courses in Medieval English Literature or Chaucer, using the original texts. Dissertations on medieval works can be expected occasionally from all these and, more exceptionally, some other universities. A number of other universities, in Seoul and in the provinces, have professors whose major area of research is the middles ages, although in some cases they rarely have a chance to teach a course entirely in a medieval topic, or direct a graduate-school thesis/dissertation in the area.

After literature, the most dynamic single area of study, research and translation is probably to be found in the area of philosophy. Medieval philosophy came late to Korea, where the traditional view of the Middle Ages as a Dark Age was inherited through the rationalism inherited by way of Japan. Until quite recently, the history of philosophy taught in philosophy or general humanities departments skipped from ancient Greece and Rome to Descartes. In 1961, the first Catholic priest to have specialized in medieval philosophy in studies in Rome, Msgr. Jeong Ui-Chae, became professor at the Catholic Seminary in Seoul and from then until now (he is over 80) he has played the leading role in writing introductory books (his History of Medieval Philosophy is in its 10th edition) and articles, translating fundamental texts including Boethius' Consolation, Aquinas' De ente et essentia, and a number of volumes
of Aquinas' *Summa*, organizing younger scholars into the Korean Medieval Philosophy Society and in many ways making Korea the potential main centre in Asia for the advanced study of medieval Catholic philosophy. This is in part possible, he explains, because Korea has its own very active philosophical traditions of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism while its Catholic (and Protestant) believers are numerous enough to produce significant numbers of Christian intellectuals and scholars. The scholars he has helped train are now teaching and translating; he reckons that maybe as many as 15—20 full-time professors in Korea are medieval philosophy specialists in universities or theological seminaries. Some are priests, but most are not.

Interest in medieval mysticism is growing, two M.A. theses were recently written in Sogang University on Hildegard von Bingen, another on Meister Eckhart's anthropology, another on Julian of Norwich. A number of volumes of patristic texts have been translated, and a separate Patristic Studies Association exists, composed mainly of priests. Augustine's *City of God* and other texts by Augustine have also been translated in recent years. There are now signs of interest in the medieval period as also in the earlier Patristic period at Protestant seminaries, where previously strong anti-Catholic prejudices prevented sympathetic consideration of the pre-reformation period. A small number of graduates from such institutions have completed or are currently preparing doctorates in Europe or the U.S. focussing on such topics as Aquinas, Meister Eckhart, the German women mystics, etc. One has a doctorate in Carolingian theology.2)

Many English departments include a number of professors whose major interest is theoretical linguistics, because they studied in the United States, but

2) Information provided by Msgr. Chŏng Ui-Chae and Professor Lee Sang-Sŏp, Philosophy Department, Sogang University.
in addition there is a long tradition of teaching and studying historical English linguistics. Many university curricula include a regular course on the history of the English language and this has led a number of graduate school students to specialize in that area, including some who are mainly focusing on the middle ages.

An aspect of medieval culture that figures prominently in Korea is the final spin-off of romance found in computer games using medieval-style fortresses and methods of warfare. Given the immense interest of Korean young people in such games, it is to be hoped that they may provoke a wider interest in the period among the younger generations. This, like the medieval setting sometimes adopted for horror movies, and popular gothic romances, has engendered a new area of cultural studies, known as Medievalism, which is enjoying considerable popularity in many parts of the world, including Korea. In this, the reinventions of the Middle Ages in the centuries following are explored and analysed.\(^3\)

2. The Middle Ages in Korean academic associations

Most Korean university professors with a Ph.D. degree in some medieval topic depend on regular meetings of more broadly-based academic associations and publication in the journals of these associations for possibilities to present and publish their ongoing research in the area of their major interest. There are general, umbrella associations for English language and literature, and for western history, which provide an initial haven for lonely medievalists, but in recent years there has been a move to establish more specialized associations.

1. 한국중세르네상스영문학회 The Medieval and Early Modern English Studies Association of Korea (http://memesak.org/)

The Medieval English Studies Association of Korea (as it was initially known) was formally launched on June 13, 1992, when Kim Jin-man, Korea's first medieval English literature scholar, was elected as president. From its inception, the Association has held regular meetings twice a year in spring and fall, at which members have read papers related to medieval English literature. Since 1993 these and other papers have been published in a review: *Medieval English Studies*. In addition, the Association is affiliated with the English Language and Literature Association of Korea and organizes sessions at the Conferences organized by ELLAK. Each year for the past 7-8 years, up to 6-8 members of the Association have presented papers at sponsored sessions at the Medieval Congress at Kalamazoo. In return, the Medieval Institute at Kalamazoo sends one scholar each year to speak at the Association's Fall Conference in Korea. A number of other American medievalists have begun to make the journey to this conference at their own expense.

In 2003 the Association widened its scope to include the Renaissance, in recognition of the fact that members usually teach and do research in both "periods," and changed its name to The Medieval and Early Modern English Studies Association of Korea. Its journal has likewise changed its name to *Medieval and Early Modern English Studies*. In the last few years its journal has published two numbers a year and its quality has been recognized by the Korea Research Foundation that evaluates academic publications and activities. The Association has about 60 full members, as well as several dozen graduate-school members and affiliated foreign scholars. Not all of the Korean members are medieval specialists but all are interested in the literature and culture of that and the early modern period.
Publications: A fine translation into Korean of the *Canterbury Tales* by Kim Jin-man was published some 30 years ago. In 2007, a new Korean translation of the *Canterbury Tales* was published, made by 2 younger members of the Association. Other MEMESAK members have recently published Korean translations of *Beowulf* and *Troilus and Criseyde*. In 2002 two members published an edition of the Middle English text of some of the most popular parts of *The Canterbury Tales*, with introductions and notes in Korean, at Seoul National University Press. The translator of *Troilus* has recently published a general study of Chaucer entitled *The Literary World of Geoffrey Chaucer* offering for the first time in Korean an overall guide to the English, Latin, French and Italian backgrounds to Chaucer's work, and another volume serving as an introduction to the *Canterbury Tales*. The Association's Fall Conference is now usually an International Conference, sometimes with government funding, with presentations by a number of scholars from other countries, including Taiwan, with which the association also has an exchange relationship. In recent years, members of the MEMESAK have been invited each year to read papers at the medieval and early modern conferences held alternately at Fujen University in Taipei or at the Sun Yat Sen National University in Kaohsiung.

2. 한국 중세철학회 Societas Philosophiae Mediaevalis Coreana, The Korean Society of Medieval Philosophy (http://www.philosophia.or.kr/)

The Korean Medieval Philosophy Society has perhaps 60 members, meets 2 or 3 times a year and has published a journal 『중세철학논문집』(*Papers in Medieval Philosophy*) for the past 10 or so years, written entirely in Korean though with abstracts in English. Aquinas, Scotus and Bonaventura, together with Okham and Abelard, are the main topics of interest.
3. 한국서양중세사학회 The Korean Society for Western Medieval History (http://mahan.wonkwang.ac.kr/medsociety/)

Founded in May 1996, this Association has over a hundred members, including graduate-school students and affiliated foreign scholars. It holds regular meetings at which papers are presented, usually four times each year, but 5 times in 2003. It has published a journal, 『서양중세사연구』(Studies in Medieval Western History), twice a year since 1997, and has now published 12 volumes. It seems to have no relationship with any scholarly association outside of Korea, and has so far never invited a foreign scholar to address any of its meetings.

4. 한국영어학학회 The English Linguistics Society of Korea (http://www.elsok.org)

The Society for the History of the English Language was founded in 1993 as a forum for this interest. In 2002 it changed its name to the English Linguistics Society of Korea and among its 150-or-so members are a number whose main research interests are in medieval English. It too publishes a journal 『영어학연구』(Studies in English Linguistics), and organizes two conferences each year; a number of its senior members are active internationally in related associations.

In addition, papers on topics related to medieval literature are sometimes presented at the conferences and published in the journals of the following associations: 한국영어영문학회 The English Language and Literature Association of Korea (http://www.ellak.or.kr/), 한국밀턴과 근세영문학회 Milton
and Early Modern English Studies (http://www.memes.or.kr/), 고전르네상스영문학회 The Classic and English Renaissance Literature Association of Korea (http://www.renaissance.or.kr) and 한국 문학과 종교 학회 The Korean Society for Literature and Religion (http://www.kslr.or.kr/).

5. Published translations

In addition to the translations of medieval literature mentioned previously, it should be noted that a very considerable number of translations of studies of medieval theology, philosophy, literature, history, art and culture, mainly originally published in Europe, have appeared in commercial presses in recent years. The lists below are far from complete, but they suggest that the Middle Ages provoke a higher level of interest in Korea than the small number of courses taught in the universities might suggest. It would be desirable to work further on these lists in order to establish a full Bibliography of Korean texts on medieval topics. The author would be very grateful for information on missing titles.
A. Medieval texts translated and published in Korea in recent years

1. Theology / Philosophy

Saint Augustine.


*City of God*. 『신국론』. 성업 역주. 경상북도: 부도, 2004. (3 vols)


Saint Thomas Aquinas


*De rationibus fidei*. 『신앙의 근거들』. 김율 옮김. 서울: 철학과현실사, 2005


*Summa theologiae*. (토마스 아퀴나스) 『神學大全』; 鄭義采 역. 바오로말, 1997-4권부터 라틴-한글 대역판으로 출간.
Saint Bonaventure

*Vitis mystica*. 권숙애 역. 서울: 시글, 1997


2. Literature

*Beowulf*. 이동일 역. 서울: 문학과지성사, 1998


B. Studies on medieval topics written and published in Korea recently


김완수 외, 『서양 고중세 철학과 그 유구한 문제들』. 서울: 철학과현실사, 2002

김용숙. 『중세 불어의 이해』. 서울: 이화여자대학교 출판부, 1996


김재환. 『켄터베리 이야기 연구』. 서울: 소화, 2004


송병구. 『하나님을 어떻게 알 수 있는가: St. Augustinus의 존재론적 인식론』. 서울: 한들, 2004

안선재; 이동춘. 『초서의『켄터베리 이야기』에 대한 텍스트 비평』. 서울: 서울대학교출판부, 2002

C. Books on medieval topics translated from other languages and published in Korea in recent years


아베 긴야. 甦える中世ヨーロッパ. 『중세유럽산책』. 양억관 옮김. 파주: 한길사, 2005.


Baldwin, John W. The Scholastic Culture of the Middle Ages, 1000-1300. 『중세 문화 이야기』. 박은구, 이영재 옮김. 서울: 혜안, 2002.

Baring-Gould, Sabine. Curious Myths of the Middle Ages. 『중세의 전설』. 이길


Delort, Robert. *La vie au Moyen Age*. "西洋中世의 삶과 생활." 김동섭 역. 서울:


Verdon, Jean. *Le Moyen Age: ombres et lumieres*. 중세는 살아있다: 그 어둡고


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Abstract

Medieval studies in Korean universities are limited by the perceived difficulty of the subject. Few universities offer courses on medieval topics, even at graduate school level. Yet there are a number of scholars whose main area of research is centered in the Middle Ages and a number of academic associations devoted partly or fully to that. Doctoral dissertations are written on medieval topics, at least occasionally. The number of books on medieval topics translated into Korea or written in Korean suggests a much wider potential interest, while the use of medieval setting in computer games indicates the enduring imaginative power of the period.

Key Words

Medieval studies, Korean translations, medievalism