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**Presidential Address on the Occasion of the Seventy-fifth Annivesary Celebration of the Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch**

I feel both awed and honored to stand on this auspicious spot this afternoon in the physical and spiritual presence of so many of those who have excelled in Korean scholarship and professional activity. Nonetheless, I shall attempt to perform my required task with a proper degree of decorum.

The original Council of the Society, formed on June 16, 1900, included such familiar names as Horace Allen, J. H. Gubbins, James Gale, Homer Hulbert, H. S. Underwood, Samuel A. Moffott, H. G. Appenzeller, George H. Jones and others. Past presidents of the Society over the years included the names of Gubbins, Gale, Trollope, H. H. Underwood, Koons, Lay, Hunt, Clark, H. G. Underwood, Hertz, Chambard, Paik, Steinberg, Kinney, Samuel H. Moffett, Carl Bartz, Trench, Kim Jung-sae, Landy, Rutt and Wanne J- Joe.

The Society has tried, often through difficult times, to retain its original purpose, as drafted by Homer B. Hulbert for the first Constitution : “to investigate the arts,history,literature and customs of Korea and neighboring countries.” It hasn’t always been easy for one reason or another. I am struck by H. H. Underwood’s statement in his presidential report for 1939: “The members of the Society have all been working under conditions which did not lend themselves to

\* Delivered by Edward Reynolds Wright, President of the Society, at a lawn- party celebration at the official residence of the British Ambassador, William S. Bates, on June 21,1975. 200 members were present for the occasion.

[page 104] the conduct of research work.” The ups and downs of the Society have generally coincided with the ups and downs of this fascinating land of the not always so morning calm. But for the endeavors of the founders of the Society, it might have died in the early years when Korea was an object of international dispute among great powers, culminating in the Russo-Japanese War and the Japanese annexation of Korea. From January 1903 to December 1910 there was no activity by the Society. There were many years when the Transactions were printed in Japan or Hong Kong either for practical or political reasons or both. In 1950, on the outbreak of the Korean War, three of nine Council members were forceably taken north, and one did not survive. In another instance,the minutes of the Council meeting of June 2,1961, reflect concern over the implications of the “Security Martial Law” for RAS meetings. It was decided not to set a date for a next meeting until the situation could be clarified. However, the topic for a next meeting,whenever it could be held, was decided upon:”Korean Butterflies.” The fact that only fifty volumes of the “annual” Transactions have been printed over 75 years further reflects the periods of crisis on the Korean peninsula. For a more detailed survey of the Society’s history I commend to you the address delivered five years ago by Dr. Lak-Geoon George Paik entitled “ 70 Years of the RAS in Korea,” printed in Volume XLVII of the Society’s Transactions.

The underlying purpose of the Society has always been to interpret Korean culture and society to foreigners. This has been done in three principal ways: publications, programs and tours. The original philosophy of RAS membership seems to have been one of a relatively exclusive group of persons with a scholarly interest in Korea. This has evolved in the 1960’s and 1970’s into a philosophy of membership which invites participation by all persons with a serious interest in Korean culture and society. The membership in 1900 numbered [page 105] 35; in 1920,162; in 1936,225; in 1939,124; in 1957,87; in 1971, 788 ; and at present, 1,100, of whom 350 are overseas members. The Society’s growth made it necessary to hire one half-time corresponding secretary to direct day-by-day activities. The first of these was Mrs. Helen Russell, who served for one year. She was followed by the dynamic Dr. Harold Cook, who helped expand various Society programs. For the past two years Mrs. Marjorie Neil has worked closely and effectively with the Council in this role.

In the early years, programs were occasional, and papers present-ed were intended for inclusion in the annual Transactions, which was a focal point of RAS activity. Reactivation efforts following the Korean War were instigated in 1955,and by 1957, meetings had become monthly affairs, and by 1969,semi-monthly. Average attend- dance at meetings over the past three years has been about 160.

RAS tours were begun in the late 1950’s,organized primarily by Carl Miller. These are now an integral part of RAS activities with about 1,200 participants last year.

Concerning publications, the annual RAS journal, Transactions, was begun in 1900, and fifty volumes will have been produced by the end of this year. The RAS book publication program began in 1967 with four titles. The names most associated with the beginnings of this program are Robert Kinney, David Steinberg, and Spencer Palmer. Since 1967 ten more works of a scholarly or cultural nature have been sponsored or co-sponsored by the RAS. During the cur-rent calendar year (1975) five more new titles will be produced. In addition, a new RAS reprint series of out-of-print western-language works on Korea from the 19th and 20th centuries will be inaugurated later this summer. Five titles in the reprint series will be reissued under the RAS imprint by the end of this yean By the end of 1975, then, the Korea Branch of the RAS will have issued 50 copies of the Transactions and 18 original and six reprinted books. In the RAS library, [page 106] there are now 500 volumes, including a number of rare works.

In closing, I reiterate that our Society welcomes to its membership any foreigners and Koreans who are seriously interested in the RAS activities. We have attempted in our various programs to maintain a relatively high level of scholarship and creative endeavor. While such aspirations are susceptible to pitfalls, and can never be perfectly met, we shall continue to strive to develop our Society in ways that are true to the goals set by those 35 founders on that un-doubtedly hot and muggy, but fortuitous, day 75 years ago, June 16, 1900.