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**Incoming President’s Address**

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It is an honor and privilege to serve as President of Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch after being a member for about forty years. I would like to take this occasion to briefly go over the history of the RAS in the UK and in Korea.

The Royal Asiatic Society was founded by Henry Thomas Colebrooke, the eminent Sanskrit scholar. He, Sir George Thomas Staunton, Sir J. Malcolm, Sir A. Johnston, and others interested in Oriental matters met in January 1823 to draw up proposals for the establishment of such a society. The inaugural meeting took place on March 15, 1823 at the Thatched House in St James’s Street, London, with Mr. Colebrooke presiding. He explained that the scope of the new society “would embrace both ancient and modern times, and include history, civil polity, institutions, manners, customs, languages, literature, and science; in short, the progress of knowledge in Asia and means of its extension.” The Society was formally constituted as “The Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland” with a council of twenty-five members. Membership in the first year of existence included nearly every Oriental scholar of note then resident in England and numbered over three hundred. King George IV consented to be the new Society’s patron and granted it the title of “Royal.” Accordingly, at a meeting on June 7, 1823, the name was changed officially to “The Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland.”

The Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society was established on June 16, 1900 by a group of foreign residents in Korea who sought to [page 2] encourage investigation of all aspects of Korean life, culture, customs, geography, and literature to deepen their understanding of the country and its people and to make them better known to the rest of the world.

The original council of the Society included such familiar names as Horace Allen, J. H. Gubbins, James Gale, Homer Hulbert, Horace G. Underwood, Samuel A. Moffett, Henry Appenzeller, George H. Jones and others. Past presidents of the Society include the names of Gubbins, Gale, Trollope, H. H. Underwood, Koons, Lay, Hunt, Clark, H. G Underwood, Hertz, Ambassador Chambard, George Paik, David Steinberg, Kinney, Samuel H. Moffett, Carl Bartz, Trench, Kim Jung-sae, Ambassador Landy, Father Rutt and Wanne J. Joe. President Syngman Rhee was an honorary member throughout the 1950s. 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 Korean and neighboring countries.”

There have been many ups and downs for the RAS as Korea had gone through numerous tribulations: the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-05, the Japanese occupation of Korea for thirty-five years, in fact there were no RAS activities during 1903-10. In 1950, upon the outbreak of the Korean War, three of nine council members were forcibly taken to North Korea, and one did not survive. The subsequent internal political upheavals also affected the normal activities of the Society.

While not as exemplary, we are proud that we have continued along the path laid down by the thirty-five founding members on June 16, 1900, namely “to investigate all aspects for Korean life and history, etc. and make them better known to the rest of the world.” These have been done through such programs as lectures, traditional music, dance, martial arts performances, publications on various Korean topics and of the annual journal Transactions, and cultural tours both in Korea and to neighboring countries.

As president for 2006, I believe my mission is to best live up to the spirit and tradition of the RAS established over a century ago.