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Sustaining Korean Studies: Challenges and Prospects in Philippine Higher Education Institutions

Introduction

Compared to its regional neighbors, the Philippines can be considered a late bloomer in terms of the development of Korean Studies. As early as the 1980s and 1990s, for instance, major universities in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam had already set up at least one of the following: a Korean Studies Center, a full-fledged diploma/training course on Korean language, or a Korea-related undergraduate program. Among higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines, it was the University of the Philippines that spearheaded the introduction of Korea as a legitimate area of study in the mid-1970s. However, interest in and demand for Korea-related courses did not easily take off (Polo 2012, 102). It was only in the 1980s that the UP Asian Center developed Korean Studies courses as part of their graduate level curriculum. Years later, the Department of Linguistics followed suit, offering Korean language classes in 1990 (Bae and Igno 2012, 63), and the steady increase in the demand for Korean language courses eventually led to the creation of a Korean Language Track under its BA Linguistics program.

The popularity of Korean dramas in the Philippines in the early 2000s was a boon to Korean Studies as more colleges and universities in the country started to offer Korea-related courses, particularly Korean language courses. Some of these institutions received support from various funders, such as the Korea Foundation, which provided grants to Southeast Asian universities for the promotion of Korean Studies in the region (Palumbarit 2018, 51). In Ateneo de Manila University, the Ateneo Center for Asian Studies (ACAS) pioneered the

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teaching of Korean language. In 2008, ACAS started to offer a certificate course to the public for the first time while the Department of Modern Languages of the School of Humanities spearheaded the teaching of introductory Korean as an undergraduate elective course in 2010 (Lipura 2012, 79). From being a mere non-credit certificate course offered to the public, the three-unit credit course Basic Korean Language and Culture became available as a foreign language course to undergraduate students. Higher level Korean courses were later added to the list of elective courses. These developments further led to the creation of a full-fledged Korean Studies Program (KSP) under the School of Social Sciences in 2014. At present, KSP is an autonomous academic Program that currently oversees the Minor in Korean Studies and all other Korea-related initiatives of the Ateneo de Manila University.

At present, Korean culture continues to enjoy popularity in the Philippines especially among the younger generation. This, in turn, has sparked more interest not just in Korean language but also in Korean society, culture, history, and economy among others. Because of this sustained interest, an increase in the number of HEIs offering Korean Studies courses would have been expected. However, in a survey on the status of Korean Studies that the KSP conducted in 2019, it was found that only eight colleges and universities in the country regularly offer Korea-related courses. Moreover, several tertiary institutions that used to offer Korea-related courses in the early 2000s have ceased offering them altogether.

The sustainability of Korean Studies in higher education is a major concern not only in the Philippines but also in other countries despite the generous support provided by the Korean government and other private organizations. In Mexico, Brazil, and Paraguay where there are undergraduate degree programs in Korean Studies, HEIs encounter difficulties such as securing and retaining faculty members (Choi 2020). It is also not uncommon for Korean Studies academics and scholars to constantly struggle in asserting their relevance even in their own universities and departments (Saeji 2018, 445). Moreover, heavy reliance on external funding and grants, especially during the establishment and early years of Korean Studies, also characterize universities in neighboring countries (Bang and Khoun 2021).

Our study endeavors to explore the challenges and opportunities experienced by Philippine HEIs in sustaining Korean Studies, with particular focus on the two leading tertiary institutions: the University of the Philippines

(UP), the country's premier state university, and the Ateneo de Manila University (AdMU), a top private university established and run by the Society of Jesus.¹ Although having different organizational structures, both universities have demonstrated success in institutionalizing Korean Studies in the Philippines and have resolutely asserted the relevance of the field in the academe for the past decade. In this study, we consider the concept of sustainability put forward by Hargreaves and Fink (2006, 24), that "is basically concerned with developing and preserving what matters, spreads, and lasts in ways that create positive connections and development among people and do no harm to others in the present or in the future."

The importance of organizational structures in the sustainability of any initiative cannot be ignored. Vodonick (2018), for instance, found that the type of organizational structure that is most likely to ensure sustainability is one that can be described as an adhocracy. Such a structure is highly organic; where solutions result from collaboration, prompted by urgency rather than authorization. Other studies also point out the variation in sustainable practices depending on the organizational structure, which presents challenges, especially when implementing improvements (Baumgartner and Engert 2016; Batista and De Francisco 2018).

Employing the sustainability lens enables the shift in focus from merely establishing and developing ways to expand the study of Korea in the Philippines to finding more effective means to sustain Korean Studies in the country.

The Study

There are two main questions by which this study is underpinned: how do HEIs with two different organizational structures and academic programs run and sustain Korean Studies? What are the issues, challenges, and opportunities faced by these two HEIs in maintaining and expanding Korean Studies? In addressing these questions, we employed a qualitative approach, particularly conducting in-depth interviews with key informants to explore Korean Studies

1. The Society of Jesus is a religious order of the Catholic Church and is also known as the Jesuits.

in UP. For AdMU, it is important to note that the authors are directly affiliated with the Korean Studies Program of said university and as such, we engaged with collaborative autoethnography (Roy and Uekusa 2020, 383), in assessing our own program and comparing it with that of UP.

Five participants from UP and four participants from Ateneo were involved in this study—all of whom have at least two years of working as Korean Studies teaching staff or administrator in the respective universities. All interviews with UP participants took place online between February to March 2022. In the case of the participants from Ateneo, we wrote our autoethnography using the same interview guide used for UP participants then had a joint discussion on our reflections.

The text documents, consisting of interview transcripts and reflective essays, were processed by topic modelling to determine salient themes in the narratives. Topics were produced in the form of aggregated keywords that tended to co-occur throughout all of the documents. Word clouds enabled us to visualize the results and we listed the top keywords in each topic using their probability distributions. The topics were then thematically interpreted with representative statements to produce grounded insights from the narratives (Nikolenko, Koltcov, and Koltsova 2015). We used the insights from the results of the topic model to identify the issues, challenges, and opportunities in sustaining Korean Studies in both UP and AdMU.

The Context: Organizational Structure and Its Implications on Sustaining Academic Programs

Korean Studies Departments

At the University of the Philippines, three separate units are primarily involved in running and therefore sustaining Korean Studies: the Department of Linguistics, the Asian Center, and the UP Korea Research Center.

The Department of Linguistics under the College of Social Sciences and Philosophy is in charge of developing and offering Korean language courses. It also oversees the BA Linguistics program, where students may opt to take the Korean Language Track. Korea-related content courses at the graduate level, on the other hand, are offered by the Asian Center. In its MA Asian Studies program, students with specialization in Northeast Asia may consider Korea

as a country of concentration. The UP Korea Research Center (UP KRC) complements the work of the two separate units. It functions as a research hub under the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs and is in charge of the publication and dissemination of conference proceedings, policy papers, and research on Korea. It also plans and conducts year-long lectures, workshops, symposia, and conferences.

In contrast, the Korean Studies Program under the School of Social Sciences of the Ateneo de Manila University is the sole unit that consolidates all the Korea-related initiatives of the university. Through its close collaboration with other academic departments and programs, Korean Studies courses were developed for undergraduate students. Through the years, the program has also published relevant research that covers themes across various disciplines in the Social Sciences and Humanities. Its main offering is the Minor in Korean Studies program, the first of its kind in Philippine higher education, which employs a critical and interdisciplinary approach to the study of Korea. Apart from the regular undergraduate courses, KSP also offers extramural classes to the public and conducts inter-university and regional Korean Studies lectures, seminars, workshops, and conferences. In collaboration with the university's central repository, the Rizal Library, it established the Portal of Korean Studies Resources in the Philippines, the only database that collates and centralizes access to Korean Studies references in the country.

Korean Studies Budget

For both UP and AdMU, annual budget and external funding are centralized, with systems and processes in place for the accounting and auditing of operational expenses. In UP, funding comes from the state university's share of the government budget. Such funding is enough for the three units to operate regularly. However, expenses beyond their allotted budget, such as payment for roundtrip airfare tickets for field research, honoraria for invited foreign resource speakers, or related expenses for use of venue and meals of conference attendees, are to be funded by external grants. Thus, among the tasks of the Department Chair or Center Director is to apply for external grants or seek sponsorships in advance. The Korea Foundation and the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS), have been continuously providing generous funding for such endeavors. The Korean Embassy, the Korean Cultural Center in the Philippines, and the Korea

Tourism Organization have also provided sponsorships and financial support for these initiatives.

Similar to the centralized funding instituted in UP, there is an annual allotted budget to the Korean Studies Program provided by AdMU. Since its establishment, however, KSP has relied heavily on resources from the Korean government and its agencies. Through the AKS Korean Studies Seed Grant and Support Programs, the university was able to incubate and institutionalize KSP as an autonomous academic and degree-granting unit in 2012. Through the auspices of the Korea Foundation, KSP was assured of the engagement of a Korean visiting professor who teaches higher level Korean language courses for at least two academic years and a budget for the conduct of an annual interdisciplinary seminar-workshop on Korea for Filipino high school educators.

Teaching Staff

In both HEIs, there exist institutional policies on faculty hiring and recruitment. Most of the faculty members have been recommended by their home universities and were former scholars and student returnees from South Korea. As former international students in Korea, they have firsthand experience of the country. Most of them have also undergone language training prior to embarking on graduate or doctoral studies and have at least intermediate Korean language speaking skills. Faculty members can thus teach both Korean language and content courses. This can actually be considered one of the strengths possessed by Filipino scholars of Korean Studies. Courses on Korea offered in both UP and AdMU are not limited to mere language and culture courses. The list extends to economics, history, politics, literature, and even translation, all of which reflect the diverse research and academic portfolio of Filipino scholars involved in Korean Studies. Academics who take on leadership roles and are appointed to administrative positions in Korean Studies usually start as faculty members or assume dual responsibilities as teaching staff and administrator. Both HEIs follow their own institutional policies and procedure for administrative appointment.

The narratives of the Korean Studies faculty were the first to be subjected to topic modelling, followed by those of the administrators. The underlying themes in the topics were interpreted based on the word clouds generated and the probability distributions of the top 10 keywords. Below are the keywords for

the four clusters of the trained model:



Figure 1. Word Cloud by Topic (Faculty)



Figure 2. Word Cloud by Topic (Administrator)

The word clouds and probability distributions of the keywords reveal what each topic is about but as they are algorithmically derived, the task of putting them in context and providing thematic coherence rest on the researchers. Thus, statements were extracted with the highest topic percentage contribution for qualitative analysis. With this intervention, subjective bias that may have rendered the results invalid was minimized.

Sustaining Korean Studies: The View of Faculty and Administrators

The representative statements made by faculty during the interviews reveal a common challenge that both universities face: the need to diversify and seek creative ways not only to promote and maintain interest in Korean Studies, but more importantly, provide new avenues in approaching, studying, and examining Korea-related topics that fall outside of the usual route that focuses on language and culture.

Topic 1 (Inclusive Decision-making and Consultation with Faculty) highlights the importance of collaboration in developing various programs and initiatives that promote Korean Studies in the academe. Whenever decisions that affect the program's direction in so far as achieving its goals are made, they are easily communicated and discussed with the faculty member involved. As imparted by a male faculty member with more than 10 years of experience teaching Korean language:

Decisions that affect Korean language teachers are easily made. It helps that a good relationship exists among faculty members in the department so it is easy to call for a meeting, for instance, whenever there is a need to decide on things. I wouldn't say there's too much bureaucracy involved. So I'd say relatively things are really easily decided on.

Topic 2 (Multidisciplinary Approach to Korean Studies) suggests that the success in the expansion and popularization of teaching Korea-related courses lies in the introduction of various disciplines and perspectives. In general, Korean Studies in the Philippines has mainly focused on the study of the Korean language and popular culture in the last decade. The introduction and

creation of new courses that deal with other topics such as politics, governance, economics, management, and even the natural sciences might prove to be instrumental in maintaining its relevance and sustainability in the next few years. As the current female director of a Korean Studies Center asserted:

It would be better if there are different perspectives from different faculty members. There should be variety in courses. That's what I want to see in the future. Students write their theses in different fields. I can only do so much...With specialization, there's someone who's an expert on politics, another on society and still another on culture.

Topic 3 (Demand for Variety in Courses) also highlights this pressing challenge. Faculty members, especially those who have, for the longest time, handled language courses, find it difficult to go beyond their comfort zones and offer content courses that tackle specific issues related to the study of Korea. For a male faculty member teaching Korean language at the undergraduate level, venturing into teaching content courses should be part of one's plan to develop professionally:

Although we are in the Linguistics Department and Korean language is really our focus, I think it would be better if we also have non-language Korean Studies courses. Or at least we should strive to offer more intensive courses, similar to the Japanese language courses.

Topic 4 (Co-curricular and Extra-curricular Initiatives) further explores this same need for current faculty to look for possible collaborations, projects, grants, conferences, student organization activities, and events that may serve as supplementary mechanisms that would maintain and deepen the student body's interest in Korea. As mentioned by a female faculty member who currently handles more administrative and research load:

I try to volunteer whenever there's a need. Or when a Korean organization or university has something to offer, I try to look for ways that the department can take advantage of it. I suggest to the chairperson. The decision is for her to make; whether she accepts my suggestion or not... We plan. It's good our department is open to new ideas and challenges.

On the other hand, the representative statements culled out during the

interviews of administrators reveal a need for leadership that both meet the demand for familiarity and expertise in Korean Studies, but at the same time, a sensitivity in introducing reforms within well-established structures, and an openness to collaborate with external partners.

For instance, for Topic 1 (Delineation of Roles and Responsibilities), administrators are expected to navigate through structures that have already assigned roles and expectations on specific programs, departments, and centers. In short, as one hopes to expand Korean Studies in the country and make it more sustainable, one also has to be able to respect the boundaries set by the university in terms of which unit handles, for instance, the offering of language courses, degree-granting programs, and research-based outputs. According to a male former director of a Korean Studies research center:

There should really be a clear distinction between units. If one unit is offering something similar to the other unit, there would be a problem. However, collaboration among us is easy.

Topic 2 (Challenging the Status Quo) mirrors this same challenge, in such a way that it seeks to explore whether the organizational restructuring of offices and units within the university is something needed for specific goals and objectives to be achieved. This is most especially crucial because some mandates and functions, at some point, do overlap. Comparing the organizational structure of Korean Studies in her university, a female director of a research center had this to say:

I also like the idea of everything being housed in just one department. In North America and in some European universities, there's one big department or program that oversees everything Korean. But I don't think it will happen in my university. Anyway, it's not really a problem as long as there's distinction...As long as one does not interfere with an existing program or duplicate an existing program...As of now, the current set-up is not really bad.

Topic 3 (External Influence and Support) puts great stress on the significant role that foreign institutions, personalities, and organizations play in the creation and development of Korean Studies in the country. Similar to the other universities outside Korea that have Korean Studies programs, both UP

and AdMU have also relied heavily on external funders. When asked about how their research center was established and how funding was sourced, a former Korean Studies research center director related:

The idea to put up a research center started when our university became a member of KSASA, the Korean Studies Association of Southeast Asia. In a way, the director of the Korea Research Institute of South Wales persuaded us to establish some sort of an institute for Korean Studies.

And finally, Topic 4 (Qualifications in Appointing Administrators) reveals how the process of choosing and appointing administrators based on one's expertise and leadership experience affects the kinds of initiatives and programs set forth by the program in order to promote and make Korean Studies relevant and more sustainable in the coming years. In choosing the director of a Korean Studies research center, a former director of a Korean Studies research imparted that:

There's really no clear search process. There's no explicit recommendation coming from the outgoing director but it's absolutely necessary that the director has a Ph.D. degree since he or she will represent the university. At the same time, the person should be familiar with the dynamics of Korean academe and Korean research institutions. I think the system recognizes the leadership potential of the incoming director and he or she is obviously committed to the position.

Conclusion

To the knowledge of the authors, this paper is the first to examine how Philippine HEIs with two different organizational structures sustain Korean Studies. The analysis goes beyond mere consideration of course offerings or pedagogical practices but explores how resources are managed within certain organizational structures.

Without a doubt, both UP and AdMU endeavor to promote the critical study of Korea in the long term and provide opportunities for engaging and experiencing Korea in the academe, no matter what organizational structure prevails. Sustaining Korean Studies therefore does not necessarily depend on

whether separate units or a single unit advances Korea-related initiatives in HEIs.

However, institutional support matters. Notwithstanding the presence of systems and policies regarding hiring and appointment of teaching staff and administrators as well as budget allocation, the commitment of universities to sustain Korean Studies must be intertwined with their aim to bridge cultural divides and strengthen Philippines-Korea relations. Moreover, the continuance and sustainability of Korean Studies in higher education should not depend on the availability of external grants. Efficient management of financial resources is necessary and an HEI unit must be imbued with self-reliance and resourcefulness to persist. While funding should not be the main concern in scholarly pursuit, a more pragmatic approach to sustaining Korean Studies entails innovativeness, no matter what organizational setup an HEI maintains. The depth and breadth of Korean Studies that an HEI promotes would depend on how committed the founders of the program and their successors are in cultivating support from the university's administration, especially in terms of providing funding.

Equally important are the efforts of teaching staff and administrators, whose personal aspirations and concerns for their careers coincide with the soft power diplomacy of South Korea (Nye 2008). Filipinos who earned their graduate degrees in South Korean universities on scholarships continued with their "negotiated collaboration" (Kim and Cho 2022, 1) with the Korean government by becoming academics and expanding Korean language education and Korean Studies programs in the Philippines.

As is the case in many countries, sustaining Korean Studies in Philippine HEIs remains a challenge because of several issues. It is definitely not just the issue on the number of Korean Studies faculty that needs to be addressed but how much time they spend on working and how good their skills are in teaching, administration, and research.

Would it help to hire more part-time faculty members, or would it be more meaningful to help the full-time faculty improve in the aspects they feel weakest at? This is definitely not just a department issue but one that involves the whole university, especially since more Filipino students are becoming interested in learning about Korea. Managing the department or center in a way that prioritizes not only the expansion of programs and events but also the expertise and pedagogical skills of current faculty members would naturally

make Korean Studies sustainable. Taking care of the professional needs of each faculty member and guiding them towards achieving their goals connected to Korean Studies would be a challenging task but is a necessary step. These academics should be leading the scholarship in the field and not merely following trends.

Being constantly connected to other HEIs, educational institutions and the industry also contribute to sustaining Korean Studies. Actively collaborating with various institutions and co-organizing programs not only meant to be held as a one-time event, but as an annual activity also expands the reach of Korean Studies in the country and makes both the departments and Korean Studies stronger.

Student organizations in both UP and AdMU play a huge role in further promoting Korean Studies in the Philippines. The members of these organizations possess genuine passion for Korean history, culture, and language and they seek mentorship from local Korean scholars and academics for a more critical analysis of issues. Their fresh perspective on looking at Korea and their efforts to organize Korea-related events will certainly contribute to sustaining their fellow students' interest in Korean Studies. Thus, it is imperative for departments and research centers working on Korean Studies to actively partner with these student organizations and make sure that the support they need are provided.

Sustaining Korean Studies in HEIs entails "developing and preserving what matters, spreads, and lasts." This fundamentally means that the purpose of learning or conducting research about Korea must be for in-depth analysis and understanding, rather than merely superficial appreciation. What matters to us and brings us together must unite us for a greater purpose, which thereby includes bridging cultural divides. To be able to accomplish this, we must exert effort to integrate Korea in the curriculum while adopting a multidisciplinary approach. We must also develop cooperative relations not only with our colleagues but also with students who will take an active role in making the university administration realize that there is a demand for Korean Studies.

More importantly, the lifespan of a Korean Studies program must not depend solely on its founders or the selected few so that when they retire or transfer to another institution, the program crumbles or ceases to exist. There must be well-planned succession and systems in place that can support whoever takes over the key position in the program.

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