Andrew Gosling describes a major component of the Library's Asian Collections

In national terms, the Korean language collection in the National Library of Australia is extraordinary. It is by far the largest as well as most comprehensive collection in the country. The decision by the National Library's leadership in the 1950s to commence regular and wide collection in Korean language materials is one of those decisions which show real long-term thinking, and is directly responsible for the ability of scholars and others within Australia who have Korean language proficiency to carry out high-level research on Korea. In this sense it is a genuine national asset and should be maintained as such.

This assessment comes from Dr Ken Wells, President of the Korean Studies Association of Australasia.

The National Library holds nearly 36,000 volumes of monographs in Korean as well as 1500 serials and newspapers and other materials such as microfilms and CD-ROMs. These are the largest Korean holdings in the southern hemisphere, more extensive than those of any single library in Europe, though somewhat smaller than the leading North American collections. In addition, the National Library collects strongly on Korea in English and other Western languages.

The Library holds important resources for Korean studies in its special collections. The Manuscript Collection includes the papers of prominent figures associated with Korea, such as Sir William Bridgeford and Sir William Keys. The Oral History Collection houses taped interviews relating to Korea, recorded National Press Club addresses by visiting Korean leaders and even a recording of Sir Robert Menzies talking about the Korean War at a public meeting in July 1952. Elsewhere in the Library there are also extensive holdings of current and older maps of Korea, films and videos on Korean culture, and Korean musical scores.

Asian studies and Asian library collections have developed comparatively recently in Australia. Prior to the Second World War there were no significant collections of Asian publications and no Australian...
library was systematically acquiring current publications from the region. This situation changed in the 1950s, as the importance of Asia was gradually recognised. The National Library and Australian National University Library in particular started acquisition programs which have made them the leading Asian research collections in this country.

During the 1960s the National Library's Asian language collections were given a formal structure and permanent home. In April 1962 the Orientalia section was established to control Chinese, Japanese and later Korean and Thai resources. After several temporary locations around Canberra, the collection and its reading room were finally housed on the third floor of the then new National Library building in 1968, and have remained there ever since. In 1987 the section's name was changed to its current title, Asian Collections. The section now has five units with specialist language staff—Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Thai and Indonesian—but also has responsibility for other Asian language collections, including Burmese, Khmer and Lao.

In August 1968, when the National Library moved to the shores of Lake Burley Griffin, the Asian Collections held 84,000 volumes of which 2000 were in Korean. By June 2001 the Library held 25,315 titles in 35,748 volumes of Korean language monographs. This was part of a total for East Asian languages of 287,711 titles in 425,163 volumes.

The strengths of the collection lie in the social sciences—especially economics, statistics, politics and government, foreign relations and law; in Korean history, biography and archaeology; in language and literature; and in philosophy and religion.

The collection is strong in government publications received regularly on exchange. Major exchanges have operated with the National Assembly Library in Seoul since 1965, and with the National Library of Korea (also in Seoul) since 1967. The Library has a number of other exchange partners in South Korea, including universities and research institutes. Gifts from individuals and institutions are also an important source of materials. The Korea Foundation is a generous donor of publications, as is the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Canberra.

Exchange relations were established with the Grand People's Study House of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), formerly the State Central Library of the DPRK in Pyongyang in 1973. For many years this exchange was the main source of North Korean books, serials and newspapers obtained by the National Library. Unfortunately in recent years...
this exchange has ceased operating, though the Library is continuing to seek materials from and about the DPRK.

Until the 1970s, Korean materials were acquired almost exclusively through exchanges, but while these remain important, most Korean books are now purchased through commercial suppliers.

A few examples of recent acquisitions illustrate the range of materials being obtained. During the last few months, Korean language receipts have included Collected Documents on the Korean War, 1951-1953 in 17 volumes; One Hundred Years of Korean Buddhism, 1900-1999; Collection of Korean Philosophy Theses in 50 volumes; and Cultural Assets and Sites in North Korea in five volumes.

Microfilms continue to be important for retrospective sources on Korea. For instance, the Library recently acquired the microfilm collection of the Board of Foreign Missions: Korea Mission Records, 1903-57. These are from the Presbyterian Historical Society in the United States, and supplement the Library's Korea mission materials from the nineteenth century.

Original older works are also obtained. The Library has just purchased a copy in excellent condition of the 1785 edition of Jean Baptiste Bourguignon d’Anville’s Nouvel atlas de la Chine. This atlas is important not only for its detailed coverage of China, but for containing the first separate map of Korea by a European cartographer.

The McLaren-Human Collection is the Library’s most important resource for older Korean books. This major gift of rare Korean titles had belonged to Mrs Jessie McLaren. She and her husband went to Korea from Melbourne as Presbyterian missionaries in 1911 and stayed for 30 years. Her interest in Korean culture led her to collect many books, some of which she was able to bring back to Australia at the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941. Following her death, her daughter Mrs Rachel Human donated the material to the National Library in 1984, so that the books could be kept together and be available for use. A list of the books in the McLaren-Human Collection is available free from the Library.

Although collecting had begun much earlier, there was no consistent staffing for Korean materials until November 1971, when Mrs Taisoo Watson was employed in the then Orientalia section of the Library. Today she is a senior librarian at the University of Southern Queensland in Toowoomba. Taisoo was succeeded by Mrs Jung-Hee Fry, who has presided over the collection for a quarter of a century, completing 25 years service at the Library in August 2001. As Ken Wells has said:

The nature of the collection is very much the result of continuity in acquisitions responsibility in the person of Mrs Fry, who has been consistent and diligent in maintaining a good collection that serves the purposes of academics, the Korean reading public, and those who require reliable information on Korea.

In 1990 a second Korean position was created at the Library, and Mrs Jung-Ok Park has been Mrs Fry’s able assistant for the past 11 years. Access to the collection has greatly improved in recent times. For many years, locating Korean books required checking the card catalogue in the Asian Collections Reading Room. Today all current Korean monographs are accessible on the National Chinese, "Royaume de Corée"

Reproduced from Nouvel atlas de la Chine, de la Tartarie chinoise, et du Tibet contenant les cartes generales & particulières de cet pays, ainsi que la carte du royaume de Corée... (1785).

Amsterdam: chez Barthélemy Vlam, 1785

Map Collection MAP Ru 282

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Japanese and Korean (CJK) Service and in the National Library's own online catalogue, searchable through the Internet. The National CJK Service is an automated system for cataloguing East Asian scripts. It was implemented in 1996 and currently has 24 member libraries from around Australia. A major milestone was reached in July 2001, as all titles in the National Library's main Korean monograph run have now been catalogued onto the automated system.

Since the early 1990s Australian libraries have increased their efforts to improve Korean collections nationally. By then, Monash University had established a Korean research collection as part of the National Korean Studies Centre linking several Victorian universities, while Griffith University was also becoming active in Korean studies. In 1995 the National Library convened a meeting on Asian collecting which decided that, given Australia's increasing interest in Korean studies and collections, Korean language holdings should be a priority for cooperative action. In March 1996 the Library organised a Korean Collections Meeting, which called for an evaluative study of user needs. The Survey of Users of Korean Materials in Australia was carried out during 1997. Funding was provided by the Korea Foundation, the Australia-Korea Foundation, the Korean Studies Association of Australasia and the National Library. In all some 155 scholars, librarians, officials and business people either answered a questionnaire or were interviewed. The survey report is accessible through the Library's Korean web pages, at www.nla.gov.au/ asian/lang/kor.html.

Recommendations arising from the survey included the need for Australian libraries to continue working together to improve access to print and electronic sources on Korea; promote their collections and the automated National Chinese, Japanese and Korean (CJK) Service; improve cooperation with Korean libraries; and to collect strongly about North Korea. Following the survey, the Library has continued to devote considerable resources to acquiring

Korean and Western language works about Korea, including items on North Korea. There has also been extensive promotion of the collection and the National CJK Service, as well as further cooperation with Australian and Korean libraries.

Prior to the survey, the National Library and the Australian National University Library had already signed an agreement in August 1996 to cooperate in the collection of Korean language materials. This was to avoid duplication, and promote use of Korean holdings at both institutions. Under this agreement the National Library has undertaken to continue to develop and maintain a research level collection capable of supporting the needs of postgraduate students and independent researchers.

As it has for the past five decades, the National Library remains strongly committed to providing Korean collections and services in cooperation with other libraries. The range of what is collected is also expanding now that CD-ROMs and online resources on Korea are becoming available. Scholarly interest in Korea is growing, as was clear from attendance at the Korean Studies at the Dawn of the Millennium conference held in Melbourne in September 2001. Given Korea's importance to Australia, readers are likely to make more and more use of the Library's resources in future.

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(below) Jung-Hee Fry and Jung-Ok Park, Korean Unit, National Library
Pictorial Collection NL38908/04

(bottom) From left to right Dr Ken Wells, Australian National University; Marie Sexton, National Library; Ruth Megrian, Sulven Consulting; and Andrew Gosling, National Library were involved in conducting the Survey of Users of Korean Materials.