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Report for the IRIS Graduate Student Summer Fieldwork Award (2025)

With the generous support of the IRIS Graduate Fieldwork Award, I was able to conduct extensive archival fieldwork and interviews in South Korea that helped expose new perspectives in postcolonial studies and expand on the existing ones drawn from engaging with the several facets of historical events in Korean modernization. The award enabled me to travel back to Korea from May 18th to August 8th of 2025 and pursue the research about colonial affect with the archives at the National Congress Library and Textbook Museum. My fieldwork in South Korea focuses on visual cultural materials in Korean education, which shows the relationship between the U.S. and Korea from the late 19th century to the 21st century, such as textbooks, educational magazines, and archives. The study explores visual materials in the curriculum to examine the conditions of creating the notion of the ideal human being and how visual materials affect people differently within diverse historical and cultural contexts.

The summer fieldwork is conducted for two parts: archival research and interviewing teachers. First, as archival research, I went to the National Congress Library in Seoul and the Textbook Museum in Sejong to get 19th-century and 20th-century educational archives. I collected the data for 19th century U.S. missionaries' primary resources about what subjects they taught, what educational materials they used, and how these educational materials impacted the Korean educational system. I analyzed several U.S. missionaries' archives of H.B. Hulbert, who published the world history textbook, and Mary F. Scranton, who has a record of using magic lantern slides for teaching English and Western culture, which represent racial hierarchy and Eurocentrism. Such notions of visual materials are aligned with the late 19th century U.S. magic lantern slides, which show the basic social norm in the U.S. This connection indicates how U.S. missionaries could make Eurocentric or racially hierarchical educational materials in Korea. Also, I collected the archives of Chiho Yun, who is a well-known modernized Korean, to examine how Koreans form the affect from Westernized education. His diaries and newspaper articles indicate how Koreans become modernized and feel about the modernization, which provides the conditions for the notions of the ideal human figure. Historicizing archival work represents the 19th century U.S.-Korea relationality, which is embedded in the notion of the ideal human figure, based on modernity, which is a kind of epistemic colonial practice.

Another archival research for the 20th century is the textbook contents and educational resources during the Cold War era. I went to the National Congress Library and the Textbook Museum to collect 1944-1980 Korean world geography, history textbooks, educational journals about anti-communism and nationalism. Since Korea was governed by the U.S. military for three years (1945~1848), Korea was highly influenced by the U.S. educational system. It has been prolonged after the Korean War. I found many Eurocentric and nationalistic discourses in the textbook, which relate to the influence of the U.S. and Korean dictatorships. Different from the late 19th century, the U.S.-Korea relationship constructs different conditions of possibility to shape the notion of the ideal human figure. Anti-communism educational materials, such as educational magazines or textbooks, were influenced by the U.S. However, they include Korean social contexts based on nationalism and ethnocentrism. These archives are deeply connected to the notion of democratic citizenship in the 1970s, which is also connected to epistemic colonial practice and the technology of governance.

For the second part of the research, I conducted the interview for seven weeks (June 1st to July 19th) with fourteen K-12 teachers (six U.S. teachers and eight Korean teachers). I created a flyer to contact teachers who have been using AI visual materials for their teaching. Different from the previous two eras, I could contact the people who are actually using visual materials in the classroom. In the previous two archival research projects, I tried to find the connection between archives and people, and how they could perceive the materials and the possibility of constructing the notion of an ideal human. As AI visuals are current educational materials, I could collect actual users' thoughts from the interview. I interviewed teachers to share their teaching experiences with AI visual materials and how they perceive their Gen-AI images. As I assumed, I found that there are different discourses around teachers about racial hierarchies or Eurocentrism since AI has different formats compared to the previous educational materials. Also, I found the different connection between visual materials and humans compared to the traditional visual

materials, which is not a linear but a circulatory relation to knowledge production. The interview offers a different way to produce the notion of the ideal human, based on an algorithm and a prompt engineering, which creates the data by co-construction.

The experience of this fieldwork at the pre-dissertation stage helped me strengthen my theoretical framework for the curriculum practice. Situated at a crucial juncture of my academic timeline, the outcomes of this fieldwork would help me work on my doctoral proposal. I am grateful to IRIS for providing me with this opportunity and supporting my dissertation research to go smoothly.