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International Knowledge Hub: The Center for the Study of Chinese Characters in South Korea

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1 History

Established in September 2008, the Center for the Study of Chinese Characters in South Korea is South Korea's first research center dedicated to Chinese character studies and stands as a testament to the successful internationalization of Korean Chinese character research and the formation of a comprehensive international collaboration network.

The center has undertaken an array of activities to further its mission. These include regularly hosting large-scale international academic conferences, supporting the Secretariat of the World Association of Chinese Characters Studies, partnering with leading domestic and international organizations, and publishing international-level journals and research series. In addition, the center has organized professional colloquiums and won numerous domestic and international projects.

Through these initiatives, the center has successfully achieved several milestones, such as transforming into an international research hub, developing a self-sustaining foundation, and executing joint human resource development projects. This growth and development have paved the way for a significant transformation, presenting new opportunities and challenges.

2 Project Achievements

Over the years, the center has undertaken and successfully completed various projects that have significantly contributed to the advancement of Chinese character studies. Two of our most impactful achievements include “Authorization of the Korean Modern Chinese Character Dictionary (Okpyeon) and DB Construction” and “Research on Chinese Characters and East Asian Civilizations—Communication

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(疏通), Motivation (动因), and Journey (导航) of Hanja Road.” These projects reflect our commitment to providing world-class research and fostering an inclusive and cooperative research environment.

2.1 Authorization of Korean Modern Chinese Character Dictionary (*Okpyeon*) and DB Construction

A highlight in our journey has been the successful execution of “Authorization of Korean Modern Chinese Character Dictionary (*Okpyeon*) and DB Construction Research,” a project funded by the Basic Research Support Project in Korean Studies, under the Korean Studies Promotion Service (KSPS). Running from 2014 to 2017, the project aimed to advance the study of Chinese character dictionaries in modern Korea (1894–1945), and offer a cutting-edge research tool — a comprehensive “Points-sorted-out Electronic Version of Korean Modern Dictionary (*Okpyeon*) DB.”

The project significantly enriched the field of Chinese character studies, with a major achievement being the digitization of 12 representative autobiographies from the modern period. This accomplishment, in turn, shed light on key aspects of Korean Chinese characters and language evolution.

2.2 Chinese Characters and East Asian Civilizations—Communication, Motivation, and Journey of Hanja Road

Since 2018, the center has embarked on an ambitious seven-year journey, undertaking the Humanities Korea Plus (HK+) Support Project. Themed “Chinese Characters and East Asian Civilizations—Communication (疏通), Motivation (动因), and Journey (导航) of Hanja Road,” the project operates under the auspices of the National Research Foundation of Korea.

This project has positioned us as a global nexus for Chinese character culture research, fostering connections not only with Korean researchers, but with scholars worldwide. Our commitment is to recalibrate the global orientation of Chinese character studies, historically dominated by China and Japan, and to present a uniquely Korean perspective. Bolstered by this project, our vision is to be recognized as a world-class research center, implementing a “New Journey” in Chinese character culture. As part of our dedication to nurturing global citizens with deep understanding and appreciation of East Asian Chinese character culture, we have established the Regional Humanities Center. Our aim is to cultivate creative global citizens who can lead future trends with their understanding and inventive experiences of East Asian Chinese character culture.

3 Academic Journals

Central to our mission is the pursuit of knowledge and innovative research that broadens the understanding of East Asian Chinese character civilization and related subjects. A testament to this commitment is the publication of two internationally recognized academic journals. *The Journal of Chinese Character Studies*, established in 2009, adheres to the standards of the Korea Citation Index (KCI) and global academic benchmarks. This bilingual journal, published in both Chinese and English, is maintained by a diverse editorial board of 24 members from 15 countries, ensuring a rich assortment of high-quality papers. Proudly KCI-listed since 2017, we aim for further recognition, with aspirations for inclusion in SCOPUS and the Arts & Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI).

In addition to our own publication, we collaborate with the World Association of Chinese Characters Studies to publish *The International Journal of Chinese Character Studies*. This journal, exclusively in English, serves as an international platform that showcases the most current and groundbreaking research in the field, further demonstrating our commitment to international scholarship in Chinese character studies.

4 Publications

Since our inception, we've embarked on an ambitious journey of scholarly exploration, authoring and publishing a total of fifty-five diverse works that thoroughly delve into the depth and breadth of the field. These publications not only reflect our dedication and expertise but also our commitment to enriching the field with rigorous and insightful analysis.

Our dedication is evidenced by the substantial output, ranging from foundational works like *Xu Shen and Shuowen Jiezi* (2014) and *Etymological Dictionary of Chinese Characters* (2014, 2018) to specialized volumes like *Reading Busan and its history in Chinese characters* (2017), *Chinese Culture Reading with 100 Chinese Characters* (2017) and *Three-dimensional Chinese Character Studies* (2018). In 2017, our center made significant contributions with the publication of ten works as part of the "Punctuation and Collation Double Large Electronic Edition" series. This series offers a versatile collection of materials accessible to diverse audiences.

Our publications also cover interdisciplinary subjects, intertwining language and culture. Works such as *Cultural History of War* (2021) and *Cultural History of Fish Names* (2022) exemplify this approach.

Our commitment to education is further exhibited through volumes such as *Learning 12 Kinds of Zodiac Signs through Chinese Characters* (2020) and *4 Seasons to Learn in Chinese Characters* (2020). In the age of smart media, we've explored contemporary topics like *Digital Characters and Chinese Character Education Contents* (2021).

5 Academic Exchanges

Forging a vibrant hub for intellectual exchange, the center is at the forefront of fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing in Chinese character studies. Through hosting diverse domestic and international conferences, we encourage enriching dialogues among a broad array of scholars. Our guest lectures from world-renowned academics, coupled with public engagement activities like Civic Lectures and Humanities Camps, amplify our reach and contribute to societal cultural literacy. Moreover, our proactive international partnerships underscore our commitment to becoming a global center in our discipline, highlighting our pivotal role in the “international academic community of Chinese character studies”.

5.1 Domestic Academic Conferences

Notably, in 2019, we held the conference on “Theory and Practice of Building a Comprehensive DB of Common Chinese Characters in Korea-China-Japan-Vietnam,” demonstrating a significant commitment to cross-cultural academic dialogue. Following this, in 2022, we further delved into the “Necessity and Direction of Chinese Character DB Construction,” highlighting the importance of systematic organization in the study of these characters. Looking forward to 2023, we will be hosting the joint conference with the Korea Hanja Research Institute and the Oriental Classical Literature Association titled “Yeonghaeng and Chinese Characters Civilization.” These efforts underscore our center's critical role in the field of language studies, particularly in the understanding and preservation of Chinese characters within Korean cultural context.

5.2 International Academic Conferences

Since 2013, the center has co-hosted the World Association of Chinese Characters Studies conferences in diverse locations such as Japan, Korea, Vietnam, China, and Germany. The center has also initiated and hosted the annual Chinese Character

Studies International Camp since 2019, providing a platform for the next generation of scholars in this field. Additionally, the center has led several online international conferences and forums in 2021 and 2022, including the ‘Expansion of Artificial Intelligence and Chinese Character Research’ conference, which illustrates its adaptation to digital platforms. The center’s consistent efforts, including the upcoming 2023 International Conference on the Unification Research of Korean Chinese Character Types and the 5th Chinese Character Studies International Winter Camp, underscore its commitment to fostering global understanding and research of Chinese characters and their cultural significance.

5.3 Lectures by Internationally-Renowned Scholars

The center has invited a multitude of distinguished scholars from various fields for academic exchange since its establishment. The diversity of speakers spans across different areas of expertise, from content research in global text and character museums to Chinese character popularization through media, reflecting the center’s commitment to a multifaceted understanding of Chinese characters and culture. The scholars have tackled a wide array of subjects, including the industrialization of Chinese character culture, the exploration of Chinese culture’s Western propagation strategies, oracle bone research, and AI-based character recognition. These academics have also emphasized the intersection of traditional humanities and modern technology, such as AI and digital humanities. The center’s ongoing dialogue with international scholars like Christoph Harbsmeier, Li Xuetao, and Uchida Keiichi further underlines its global perspective, reinforcing its dedication to the study and understanding of Chinese characters in a worldwide context.

5.4 Civic Lectures and Humanities Camps

The center has made considerable contributions to promoting public education and fostering academic exchange through its diverse range of civic lectures and humanities camps. From 2014 to 2016, the center organized a series of Civil Humanities Courses supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea. In the following years, we continued to engage the public with a multitude of events such as the East Asian Humanities Experience Camp, the Chinese Character Civilization Road Exploration, and children’s classes focused on Chinese characters. The center has also facilitated in-depth explorations into local history, with initiatives like “Busan’s Hanja Road: Reading the relics of Busan with Hanja,” and practical workshops on the art of rubbing and studying Korean epigraphs. Furthermore, we’ve extended learning

opportunities into the digital age, with online colloquiums and courses on humanities in the digital era. This wide array of initiatives underscores our dedication to engaging the public in academic dialogue and fostering a broader appreciation of Chinese characters and East Asian humanities.

5.5 International Exchanges

The center has cultivated a rich network of international and domestic partnerships, strengthening its reputation as a global hub for Chinese character studies. The center has inked agreements with numerous esteemed institutions such as East China Normal University's "Character Research and Application Center", Shandong University's "Asia Calligraphy Cultural Center", and Zhengzhou University's "Chinese Character Civilization Center" among others, bolstering academic exchange and collaboration. Furthermore, its ties extend within South Korea, with partnerships including "HK Research Center" of Yonsei University, "Chinese Word and Sentence Research Center" of Korea University, and Dankook University's "Japanology Research Center." In 2018, the center played a critical role in the formation of "The Multi-Cultural Chinese Character Research League" with seven research centers across three countries. These alliances enable mutual cooperation in areas ranging from research data exchange and joint conferences to the development of Chinese character humanities programs and the compilation of multilingual dictionaries. Through these efforts, the center emphasizes a commitment to international cooperation, academic exchange, and practical projects in Chinese character studies.

5.6 Institutions Jointly Participating in International Academic Conferences

The center has taken a leading role in fostering international academic exchanges and solidifying its position as a global hub for Chinese character studies. It has collaborated with prestigious institutions globally for the organization and participation in international academic conferences. This extensive network includes several high-profile Chinese institutions including Peking University and Tsinghua University, United States institutions like the University of Arizona and University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Kansai University in Japan, HCMC University of Education in Vietnam, etc. Additionally, the center has fostered significant relationships with academic entities within South Korea, such as the Institute for Sinographic Literature and Philology at Korea University and the Convergence Institute of Autonomous

Blockchain at Dankook University. These collaborations reinforce the center's commitment to global academic exchange and its role as an international nexus for the study of Chinese characters.

6 Embracing the Future

In the coming decade, the center will consider the advice you have given us over the past decade, and it will continue to welcome your feedback based on your expectations, interest, participation in our projects. The center promises that we will strive with all our might for the next 10 years, and into the future to exceed your expectations and achieve endless progress