

Beyond South Korea's Broadband Revolution:

The Impact of an Advanced Information Technology Infrastructure on Korean Society and Culture

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Background

Beyond South Korea' Broadband Revolution is the tentative title for a collection of essays that will detail how Korea's advanced information technology (IT) infrastructure has empowered their modern information society. The collection will look at the political, economic and cultural changes that have occurred since the 1980s telecommunications revolution, the post Seoul Summer Olympics¹ digital media movement, with major emphasis on the current Broadband Revolution (1999-present). The goal of this project is to use South Korea's current technological status as a model to predict cultural developments that could result from planned implementation of similar advanced information and content delivery systems—defined as broadband, wireless and future connectivity solutions. A University of California Pacific Rim Research Grant is allowing me to work in Seoul, South Korea from June 15 – July 2, 2004 where I will develop relationships with Korean researchers, institutions, and officials so that I might complete the aforementioned essays by the end of the year 2004.

The broadband revolution is continuing the cultural and technological trajectory based on an information technology infrastructure built-up over the last 50 years from planned economic growth following the Korean War and the prior 40 years of Japanese colonial rule. The focused Korean people rose like the phoenix, literally, in one generation, since the 1950s, and went from an impoverished semi-local agricultural economy to an advanced global economic power.

More than 70% of all Korean homes are now wired with lightning-fast broadband Internet hubs (compared to the United States with 7-10%). While there has been much media-hype about Japan and Finland's use of 3rd generation wireless cell-phone technologies, which are similar in speed to home dial-up Internet, Korea has had this technology implemented for some time in addition to promoting broadband connections, which are 26-30 times faster! The importance of the broadband revolution has more to do with “what” is sent, the content, rather than “how” information is transmitted. It enables multimedia teleconferencing, including the transmission and reception of live full-motion interactive digital television, massively multi-player gaming where as many as 30,000 people can be interacting in real time, and is catalyzing the creation of new forms of art like the projects of Young-Hae Chang's Heavy Industries.

The fast connections are needed by the 44 million people of South Korea for normal daily tasks. This includes e-voting and other government-based services. Internally, the Korean government has mandated that all public and international transactions be conducted digitally. Also, Citizens are informed of new government law debates and can watch and interact with federal proceedings while they are happening. This is all part of Korea's goal for the “informatization” of the country, with the most recent plan being the e-Korea Vision 2006.²

¹ The 1988 Seoul Olympics are considered a watershed moment in Korean studies because of the nationalism and unity that the event brought to the Korean people and economy. See Larson, p. 295.

² **e-Korea Vision 2006, PDF:** http://www.mic.go.kr/eng/res/res_pub_sep_ekv_2002.jsp

Focus

My planned research will connect two very important areas of the broadband revolution: the progress of technological informatization and how it is socio-culturally influencing the Korean people. I will accomplish this through writing essays and graphically analyzing collected data to find deeper meanings and new relationships between the socio-cultural and statistical specifics of the Korean information society. While there is much written about Korea's history in relationship to contemporary social and post-cold war issues, such as "*Korea's Place in the Sun*," by Bruce Cummings (1997), and about the amazing growth of Korea's telecommunication industry in the 1980s, in "The Telecommunications Revolution in Korea," by James Larson (1995), there is a large span of time from when Larson's book was published until present that is not formally discussed in a collected academic/professional resource with an apparent connection between the aforementioned topics. This project will address the absence of scholarship in this area.

Immediately after I arrive in Seoul I am meeting with James Larson³, who is a leading expert on the Korean IT infrastructure and author of the seminal book, "The Telecommunications Revolution in Korea," mentioned above. I will interview him as well as work with him in a mentoring capacity. I have already received invitations to participate in discussions and give lectures by Jong Won Kim, Director of the Networked Media Lab at Gwangju University, Sung Kook Han, Director of the Semantic Web Lab at Won Kwang University, and Jung Jihong at Kookmin University's Graduate School of Techno-Design. Also, Jae Kyu Lee at KAIST has invited me to meet with her students. I will also interview the two former ministers from the Ministry of Information and Communication (MOIC) who are visiting professors at KAIST.

I will spend a considerable amount of time at these research universities talking with graduate and undergraduate students and giving lectures about my work. Through these talks I hope to lay the groundwork for future research. I will also begin a collaboration with world-renowned artist/writer Young-Hae Chang⁴ exploring various historical trends in new media art in Seoul. Chang has expressed his readiness to provide research access through his extensive network consisting of artists, gamers, and organizations (such as Artcenter Nabi), who work on multidisciplinary projects similar to my own.

This project connects with earlier work I have done at the University of California, San Diego on social networks, real time artwork, and data collection/visualization. While my previous first and second year projects focused primarily on Information Technology (IT) applications through software development and community-building, more recently I have focused on cross-cultural new media research, as well as analyzing how globalization is affecting virtual (on-line) and physical (off-line) networks. The Broadband Revolution is in progress now, and it is a defining time to be able to collect information and report about the Korean information culture. With the confirmed support from the UC Pacific Rim Program, my research has moved off the campus out into the field, and is allowing me to put energy into something I believe in completing.

³ James Larson's website: <http://jamesflarson.com/>

⁴ Young-Hae Chang's website: <http://www.yhchang.com/>

Curriculum Vitae (Short CV – Full CV Available on Request, or at www.rejon.org)

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Biography

Jon Phillips (www.rejon.org) is an open source developer, artist, designer, writer, educator, lecturer, and curator with 11+ years of experience creating communities and working within computing culture. His projects, both collaborative and individual, have been shown internationally at UC-Berkeley's 040404 Conference (2004), USC Aim Festival (2003), ICA London (2002), Bootlab (Berlin), and MAMA Media (Croatia). He is an active developer on Inkscape (<http://www.inkscape.org>), a cross-platform open source scalable vector graphics editor and is a project lead on the Open Clip Art Library (<http://openclipart.org>). Currently, he is writing/producing a book, "CVS: Concurrency, Versioning and Systems," (<http://cvsbook.ucsd.edu/>) about collaborative authorship and open source development and has started a "local" journal, SCALE (<http://scale.ucsd.edu/>), about remediation, aesthetics and computation.

Phillips will complete his MFA in June of 2004 at the University of California, San Diego, where he studies with Lev Manovich (<http://www.manovich.net/>) and additionally with Geof Bowker, and Joseph Goguen. He completed a BFA, New Media, at the Kansas City Art Institute where he studied with Patrick Clancy (<http://www.patrickclancy.org/>). He is affiliated with the Center for Research and Computing in the Arts (CRCA, <http://crca.ucsd.edu/>), California Institute for Telecommunications and Information Technology [CAL(IT)2, <http://calit2.net/>], and University of California Digital Arts Research Network (UC DAR Net, <http://ucdarnet.org/>).

Education

University of California, San Diego, MFA, planned completion in Fall of 2004.

Kansas City Art Institute, BFA (05/2001).

University of Texas, Austin, Additional undergraduate studies (09/1997-05/1998).

Group Exhibitions

The 9th Floor: Los Angeles, CA, 06/2003.

Dub Sound System: University of California – UCSB Reality Zone Conference, 04/2003.

AIM IV, Time, Motion and Sound (USC Festival): Los Angeles, 04/2003.

Performances & Events

Massive 2004: San Diego, CA, 05/2004.

Siggraph 2003: San Diego, CA, 07/2003.

Rival Sound I & II at UC Irvine. 11/2002 and 04/2003.

RealTime 2.0: London, UK, 06/2002.

Cyberonica: International Festival for Music & Sound, Institute for Contemporary Art:

London (ICA), London, UK, 06/2002.

Compaction I: San Diego, CA, 05/2002.

Honors and Awards

UC Pacific Rim Research Grant: UC System-wide, 03/2004 – 07/2004.

UCIRA Demonstration Grant: with Nathaniel Clark and Matt Hope, UCSD, 03/2003 – 03/2004.

Cal(IT)² Fellowship: UCSD, 09/2001 – 06/2002.

Kansas City Art Institute, Mentor Award: New Media, Kansas City Art Institute, 05/2001.

Helen Walker Crowe Scholarship: Kansas City Art Institute, 09/2000 – 05/2001.

Presentations and Lectures

“CVS and Distributive Writing using Common Open Source Software” with Patrick W. Deegan.

Narr@tive: Digital Storytelling Conference, UCLA Hammer Museum, 04/2004.

“Vector Graphics: An Overview.” UC Berkeley 040404 Symposium, 04/2004.

“Inkscape: An Open Source SVG Editor.” CRCA, 03/2004.

“The Cluster Suite Presentation” with Nathaniel Clark, UCSB Reality Zone Conference, 04/2003.

Publications

“Distributed Writing, or Geodiscursive Writing.” The Journal. Volume 1, Issue 1, 01/2004.

“Imagination is the Instrument of Survival: The Brainstorm Cluster.” *Journal of Aesthetics and Protest*. Volume 1, Issue 2, 09/2003.

Community & Culture Building

Scale Journal (01/2004 – present).

Open Clip Art Library: <http://www.openclipart.org> (11/2003 – Present).

Inkscape, Open Source SVG Drawing Tool: <http://www.inkscape.org> (11/2003 – Present).

MESH.FM, <http://www.protofunk.org/projects/meshfm/> (05/2002 – Present).

Curatorial & Organizational

Thinking/Building/Living: The Infrastructure of Digital Design (05/2002).

TIME FORMS Marathon (04/2002).