

**Provisional Title: How come Yonsei University is so international? an exploration of institutional narrative and identity** by Pearl Pang and Tianyuan Zhu

**Institutional Description:** Yonsei University is a prestigious private research university in Seoul, Korea. In 2017, of the 15,000 undergraduate students at its main Shinchon campus, 1,507 were international students matriculated at Yonsei. In addition, there were over 900 exchange students as well as 1,385 students studying Korean at the Language Institute. At any given time, there are nearly 4,000 international students on campus, not counting graduate students.

**Key Theorists:** *Working the Past: Narrative and Institutional Memory* by Charlotte Linde  
I'll be using Linde's idea of how institutions use narrative to remember, "how they work and rework, present and represent the past for the purposes of the present and the projection of a future."

The growth of relationships between home universities in the U.S. and those abroad have led to satellite campuses, joint degrees, robust exchange programs, and many new transnational collaborations which have led to interest on the impact of Americanized curriculum in other countries. Most often, such interest implies that this phenomenon is new. The first iteration of Yonsei University however, was founded by an American missionary in 1885. Currently, of the 15,000 undergraduates on the main campus, nearly 4,000 are international students, including exchange students and those studying the Korean language at the Korean Language Institute. It is by far the most international of any campus in Korea and the most popular with international students. The correlation of a long history of an Americanized education with a current, diverse international student population as well as continued development of an Americanized curriculum begs the question: how are they related? In what ways have the Korean socio-historical context and the American influence interacted with each other over the years to lead to such an international institutional culture? In order to begin tackling such big questions, I will first begin by giving an overview of the history of Yonsei University in the context of Korean history. Then, by analyzing the current institutional narrative Yonsei has embraced, one that works to redefine its founding story to apply to changing times, I hope to shed light on how it perpetuates a sense of continuity in its identity, naturalizing its international/transnational orientation.

The history of Yonsei University began on April 10th, 1885, as Korea's first modern hospital "Gwanhyewon." Two weeks after opening, King Kojong gave Gwanhyewon a new name - "Chejungwon." Gwanhyewon was established by a medical missionary, Horace N. Allen. Prior to opening, missionary Horace G. Underwood visited Korea, assisting in medical treatment at Chejungwon while starting his work in education and missionary activities. These two missionaries' work that is based in Chejungwon has become the foundation of Yonsei. (History of Yonsei, university website: [www.yonsei.ac.kr](http://www.yonsei.ac.kr))

Certainly, Severance hospital and its medical school can claim its history directly to this momentous occasion. (**Yonhui** college and **Severance** hospital joined together to become **Yonsei** University in 1957 so Yonsei, by extension can lay claim to this history.) What's interesting here is how Horace G. Underwood's transnational move to Korea is noted when he had only arrived in Korea on April 5, 1885, and how his work in education is mentioned before missionary activities. This is significant for several reasons both in light of Korean history as well as Yonsei University's. First, it was only in 1882 that Joseon Korea negotiated a treaty of amity and commerce with the United States. Korea, as the hermit kingdom, was not prepared to meet the American envoy. They had to use the services of a Chinese diplomat to translate the English into Chinese and vice versa. Written into this first treaty was the stipulation that when a Korean subject who can read and understand English within 5 years reads this treaty and finds anything amiss, it can be redressed. The situation called for immediate training of government officials in English. The task was relegated to American missionary Allan. He chose bright students who showed facility in language learning rather than social position for the task. Underwood, in similar vein, took up the mantle of mutual language exchange. Not only did he teach alongside Allen in Chejungwon, Underwood started English classes in his home, which he saw as a means for not only "drinking in Korean" but also "getting in close touch with the native, studying his habits, methods of thought, and really coming to know him from his own side." Seeing how useful books could be in evangelization, Underwood saw the pressing need to publish a dictionary and a grammar to help missionaries learn the Korean language, along with Bible translation. In 1889, after four years in the field, he published *A Concise Dictionary of the Korean Language* and *An Introduction to the Korean Spoken Language*. This privileging of the Korean vernacular for religious content, giving due scholarly attention to its merits as a language is all the more significant considering how the Japanese imperial government systematically attempted to eradicate the Korean language after it annexed Korea in 1910. This

is the educational legacy Yonsei is claiming in adjoining Underwood to Allen: a legacy of mutual linguistic and cultural exchange.

\*\*\*

A broad pedestrian walkway paved in white stone leads to the heart of Yonsei's Shinchon campus from its main gate. After passing the engineering buildings, the gym, the library on the left, and to the right, the hospital, student center, and the business building, small steps lead to three ivied stone buildings built in the 1920's (after the style of Williams College, MA). At its center is a small hedge maze, its whole function to showcase the most important symbol on campus: the statue of Horace Grant Underwood, founder of the university, with his arms outstretched. The Underwood legacy has a strong presence on campus: not only is the main building and the theology building dedicated to Underwoods, a fourth generation Underwood (who is on the university's board of directors) still lives in the old manse at the fork leading to the hospital. Underwood's story as one of the first missionaries to Korea is deeply entwined with the story of Yonsei. In using the Underwood story in its introduction and promotional materials, it could be even said that Yonsei has co-opted the Underwood story in the service of their own institutional identity.

Materials to be analyzed: (this list is subject to change)

1. Underwood statue
2. University promotional video: 2018 Yonsei University official video
3. University promotional video: Introduction of Underwood Legacy
4. Yonsei Global Institute of Theology: Introduction on university website
5. Underwood International College: Introduction on university website

*(What else interests you? Any suggestions would be appreciated!)*