

Transnational Connections: early 20th century Korean mobility to Australia

초국가적 연결고리들: 20세기 초반 한국-호주간 이동성에 관하여

루루 스펜서 (Louise Spencer), the University of Melbourne

In the 1920s and 30s, seven Koreans with ties to the Presbyterian Church arrived in Australia. This group comprised of students and those with roles within the Presbyterian Church in Korea. missionary work in Korea from the 1890s-1941 marks a significant and consequential transnational connection between the two countries that preceded the establishment of official diplomatic relations in 1961. However, the current English-language scholarship is largely focused on the contributions of prominent Australian missionaries in Korea. Consequently, very little is known about Korean people, their roles, and their experiences in these early encounters with Australians. This paper endeavours to rectify this oversight by offering a comprehensive overview of these individuals, spotlighting their participation in Australian society, reception in the media, and the pivotal role of transnational actors amidst the backdrop of the White Australia Policy era and Japanese colonial rule. Moreover, this study makes a noteworthy contribution to historical record by identifying and delineating the experiences of all seven Korean trailblazers in Australia during the interwar period. Many of these Presbyterian Koreans emerged as pivotal figures in Korea's medical history, such as Korea's first psychiatrist, Dr Lee Chung Chul, who travelled to Melbourne for a psychiatric research program in 1935. Stories such as Dr. Lee's exemplify the enduring and multifaceted connections between Australia and Korea that were formed through these early encounters, and further illustrate how transnational perspectives can enrich historical understandings of cross-cultural encounters and transnational mobility between Korea and Australia.