

## THE PRESENT SITUATION OF MIDDLE EAST & ISLAMIC AREA STUDIES IN KOREA: 2001–2006

The research being done in Middle East and Islamic area studies in Korea can be said to be at its highest level since national independence in 1948, in terms of active scholars and the quantity of funding. With the successful completion of the three-year project entitled “Middle East and Islamic Civilization in the 21st Century” in August 2005, several small and middle scale research projects are now underway with funding by mainly the Korea Research Foundation under the Ministry of Education and Human Resources. This review will introduce and discuss the background and current situation of the field in Korea between 2001 and 2006.

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND THE EVENTS OF 9.11**

The Republic of Korea is a strong ally of the United States, as a country that has relied on most of its nation’s interest to this superpower, which has been put in an influential position there following the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. National policy was designed by technocrats educated in and oriented strongly towards American culture. Under

these circumstances, Islam was neglected for a long time in Korea as a hostile factor opposing the Christian West, and was also intentionally distorted by biased western points of view. Since the 1970s, however, more than one million Koreans have had valuable experiences working mainly in the construction industry of the oil rich Arab countries. Moreover, the long-cherished Korean national goals of 10 billion dollars in exports and a per capita GDP of 1000 dollars were realized in 1978, thanks to markets in the Middle East.

While large Korean enterprise groups were busy accumulating oil dollars which catapulted them to world level heights, they paid little attention to the peoples, religions and cultures in the markets they served. Their worldview relied solely on that of the West, which regards the Islam and Arab worlds as holding a value system that threatens the civilized world. The events of 9.11 no doubt have had historic significance in many aspects of world politics and in the domestic affairs of many countries.

For example, in Korea, it became a turning point in that country's understanding of Islam and the Middle East, to the extent that it is said ironically that 9.11 is probably the best thing that ever happened to Islamic studies in Korea, forcing us to come to grips with the grotesque backlash that we are witnessing against Muslims in the west since that fateful day. Therefore, the tragedy offered Korea as "silver lining" under which renewour efforts to better understand Islam and Muslim causes in the Middle East. After 9.11, a great demand for knowledge about Islam suddenly appeared in every corner of Korean society, resulting in the expansion of public space for debate and discussion among those with differing opinions about Islam and Islamic issues. There is now a greater awareness, not just among Muslims, but also non-Muslims, especially those who have been influenced by western points of view since the 1950s. In the face of strong demand from government, the business community, and the general public for the truth about Islamic and Middle Eastern issues, Korean society found itself bogged down in almost complete ignorance and an absolute shortage of objective information and sources. This situation has been mainly caused by the lack of learned experts in the field. One example of such an information gap is the possible chaos that threatened Korea on the occasion the kidnapping of Mr. Kim Sun-Il in May 2004 and his tragic death in Iraq, resulting in the dispatch of Korean troops to the Kurdish area of Northern Iraq.

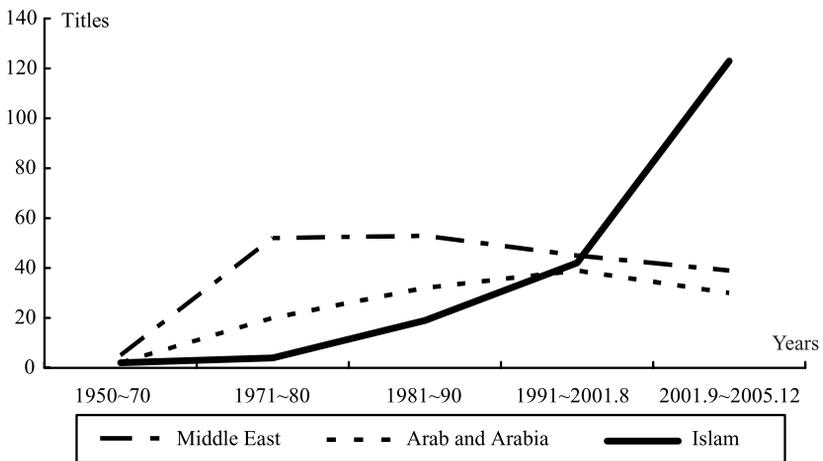
### The Booming Islamic Studies Publications

Interestingly, after 9.11 Koreans showed an extraordinary amount of concern about Islamic issues from voices favorable to Islam, instead of existing, distorted sources. In the midst of the chaos and calamity happening in world affairs, they eagerly solicited Islamic points of view in order to obtain more balanced ideas. Consequently, new books on Islam were published and widely circulated, as shown by the attached bibliography. The quantity published during only five years since 9.11 exceeds the total amount published over the past fifty.

Probably the most popular title was *ISLAM: For an upright understanding*, which was released for general reading on subjects ranging from Islamic doctrine to current issues in the Muslim world. The book has already sold more than 200,000 copies and is still going strong. This is even more surprising when we consider a publication market where books on Islam selling over a mere 1000 copies annually were few and far between. One reason for this miserable market share is that in general, publishers garnered a distaste for the word “Islam,” preferring the terms “Middle East” or “Arab” to avoid Islam’s negative image. Now exactly the opposite is true, as many books, even not directly concerned with Islam, contain the term in the title of Islam rather than Middle East or Arab. The following figure maps the changes in usage.

At the time of writing, interest in Islam has waned, since there is no

**Figure 1 Publication change on Middle East, Arab and Arabia, and Islam by titles**



Source: 2nd Korea-Arab Forum, 2005, Seoul, Korea

longer that same sense of urgency to know more about Islam and the Middle East as there was immediately after 9.11. Nevertheless, there is absolutely no doubt that (1) the 9.11 events mark a milestone for the Korean public in its opportunity to obtain new points of view about Islam, in particular, and world affairs, in general and (2) those events also brought about more scholarly research in the field of Islamic and Middle Eastern area studies and greater success in getting research funds for that purpose from the powers that be.

**THE STATUS AND RESULTS OF RELATED RESEARCH PROJECTS (2002–2006)**

In order to create increased interest from Korean society and out of reflection on the underdeveloped status of Middle East and Islamic studies in Korea, government agencies, the business sector and independent research foundations have opened up their doors wider to the field since 2001. Under such unexpected circumstances, many research projects have been offered, mainly by the Korea Research Foundation (KRF), as indicated by Table 1. The most symbolic was the project entitled “The Middle East and Islamic Civilization in the 21st Century”, which was begun in July 2002. It was a large scale endeavor, funded at about US\$3 million and completed in August 2005 with full cooperation from more than 30 Korean experts in the field. Since 2002, many other research related projects have been either completed or are still underway.

The following is a summary of the major projects and their published results.

**Table 1 Budget for humanities and social sciences (in million US\$)**

Year	2001	2003	2004	2005	2006
	4	68	68	48.6	21.6
		23.3 (Funding for leading scholars)		37 (Hms. and SS) 5 (Joint research) 6.7 (Leading scholars)	

Note: In the 2006 budget a limit of US\$300,000 was specified for any area studies project, be it related to Central Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, Oceania, or South East Asia.

## I. Middle East and Islamic Civilization in the 21st Century

Total Budget	3.057 billion won (US\$3.057 million)
Period	3 years (2002.8–2005.7)
Number of Participants	89 Ph.D. holders
Sub-Sections	Politics Economy Linguistics Women's Literature Religious Movements
Regions Studied (Year)	The Levant (2003) Arabia Peninsula & Iran (2004) North Africa & Turkey (2005)

### Published Results

Fifteen-Volume Research Series published by Hanul Academy, Seoul

- Vol. 1 *Political Development and Islam in the Levant Region* (2004.11)
- |      |                                 |                  |
|------|---------------------------------|------------------|
| Ch.1 | The Levant and Iraq             | Park, Jong-Pyung |
| Ch.2 | The New Government of Palestine | Jung, Sang-Ryul  |
| Ch.3 | Israel                          | Choi, Young-Chul |
| Ch.4 | Lebanon                         | Kum, Sang-Moon   |
| Ch.5 | Syria                           | Lee, Jong-Taek   |
| Ch.6 | Jordan                          | Park, Chan-Ki    |
| Ch.7 | Iraq                            | Yu, Dal-Seung    |
- Vol. 2 *Openness and Economic Development in the Levant Region* (2004.11)
- |      |           |                 |
|------|-----------|-----------------|
| Ch.1 | Lebanon   | Kim, Jung-Kwan  |
| Ch.2 | Syria     | Hwang, Eui-Gap  |
| Ch.3 | Iraq      | Hong, Seung-Min |
| Ch.4 | Palestine | Jang, Keun      |
| Ch.5 | Jordan    | Han, Deuk-Kyu   |
- Vol. 3 *Socio-Linguistic Study of Dialects in the Levant Region* (2004.11)
- |      |  |                 |
|------|--|-----------------|
| Ch.1 | The Relationship between Standard and Dialectical Arabic                       | Lee, Young-Tae  |
| Ch.2 | Linguistic Characteristics of Iraqi Dialects and Efficient Educational Methods | Kim, Jong-Do    |
| Ch.3 | The Language Situation in Syria  | Park, Jae-Yang  |
| Ch.4 | Colloquial Arabic in Jordan  | Choi, Jin-Young |
| Ch.5 | Arabic in Palestine  | Yoon, Eun-Kyung |
- Vol. 4 *Women's Literature in the Levant Region* (2004.11)
- |      |  |                  |
|------|--|------------------|
| Ch.1 | The Life and Art of the Palestinian Poet Fadwa Tuqan | Song, Kyung-Sook |
|------|--|------------------|

- Ch.2 A [The] Feminist Novel[s] of Gadah Samman  
Bae, Hye-Kyung
- Ch.3 The Development of Modern Women's Literature in  
Lebanon: < War and Feminism > As Described in the  
*Story of Jahra* by Hanan Sheikh Kim, Neung-Woo
- Ch.4 Feminism in the Novel[s] of Kulit Kuri Kim, Jung-A
- Ch.5 [The] Feminist Novel[s] of Daiji Amir Chang, Se-Won
- Vol. 5 *Current Situation and Future Prospects of Religious Movements in  
Levant Region* (2004.11)
- Ch.1 Saudi Arabia Choi, Young-Kil
- Ch.2 Yemen Yoo, Wang-Jong
- Ch.3 Oman Song, Kyung-Keun
- Ch.4 UAE Moon, Ae-Hee
- Ch.5 Qatar Lee, Dong-Eun
- Ch.6 Kuwait Hong, Mi-Jung
- Ch.7 Iran Shin, Yang-Sup
- Vol. 6 *Political Development and Islam in the Arabian Peninsula and Iran*  
(2005.5)
- Ch.1 The Saudi Arabian Peninsula Park, Jong-Pyung
- Ch.2 Yemen Hong, Soon-Nam
- Ch.3 Oman Park, Chan-Ki
- Ch.4 UAE Kum, Sang-Moon
- Ch.5 Qatar Jung, Sang-Ryul
- Ch.6 Kuwait Choi, Young-Chul
- Ch.7 Iran Yu, Dal-Seung
- Vol. 7 *Openness and Economic Development in Arabian Peninsula and  
Iran* (2005.5)
- Ch.1 Saudi Arabia Jang, Keun
- Ch.2 Oman Kim, Jung-Kwan
- Ch.3 The UAE Shim, Eui-Sup
- Ch.4 Kuwait Hwang, Eui-Gap
- Ch.5 Iran Hong, Seung-Min
- Vol. 8 *Socio-Linguistic Studies of Dialects in the Arabian Peninsula and  
Iran* (2005.5)
- Ch.1 Colloquial Arabic in Oman Oh, Myung-Keun
- Ch.2 The Characteristics of Saudi Arabian Dialects  
Kim, Jong-Do
- Ch.3 Colloquial Arabic in Yemen Choi, Jin-Young
- Ch.4 Colloquial Arabic in Bahrain Yoon, Eun-Kyung
- Ch.5 Colloquial Arabic in Kuwait Park, Jae-Yang

- Vol. 9 *Women's Literature in Arabian Peninsula and Iran* (2005.5)
- Ch.1 Faruk Farokjad, a Feminist Poet in Iran Kim, Young-Yeun
- Ch.2 Aziza Abdullah's *Ahlam... Nabila* and Contemporary  
Women's Literature in Yemen Kim, Neung-Woo
- Ch.3 Women's Literature in the Gulf Region Bae, Hye-Kyung
- Ch.4 A [The] Novel[s] of Kuwaiti Writer Laila Osman  
Kim, Jung-A
- Ch.5 Women's Short Stories in Modern Saudi Arabia  
Chang, Se-Won
- Vol. 10 *The Current Situation and Future Prospects of Religious  
Movements in Arabian Peninsula and Iran* (2005.5)
- Ch.1 The Sallafiya Islamic Movement Sohn, Joo-Young
- Ch.2 Palestine Yoo, Wang-Jong
- Ch.3 Lebanon Moon, Ae-Hee
- Ch.4 Syria Shin, Yang-Sup
- Ch.5 Iraq Lee, Dong-Eun
- Ch.6 Globalization and Islam Focusing on the Levant Region  
Lee, Won-Sam
- Vol. 11 *Political Development and Islam in North Africa and Turkey*  
(2006.4)
- Ch.1 North Africa Park, Jong-Pyung
- Ch.2 Turkey Suh, Jae-Man
- Ch.3 Egypt Ha, Byung-Joo
- Ch.4 Morocco Jung, Sang-Ryul
- Ch.5 Tunisia Choi, Young-Chul
- Ch.6 Algeria Kum, Sang-Moon
- Ch.7 Sudan Park, Chan-Ki
- Ch.8 Libya Yu, Dal-Seung
- Vol. 12 *Openness and Economic Development in North Africa and Turkey*  
(2006.4)
- Ch.1 Tunisia Kim, Joong-Kwan
- Ch.2 Egypt Jang, Keun
- Ch.3 Turkey Cho, Soo-Jong
- Ch.4 Libya Hong, Seung-Min
- Ch.5 Morocco Hwang, Eui-Gap
- Vol. 13 *Socio-Linguistic Studies of Dialects in North Africa and Turkey*  
(2006.4)
- Ch.1 Comparative Phonological Study of Egyptian and Moroccan  
Arabic Lee, Kyu-Chul
- Ch.2 The Characteristics of Turkish Dialects Youn, Kyu-Seok
- Ch.3 Arabic in Karthum Kim, Jong-Do

Ch.4	Morocco	Choi, Jin-Young
Ch.5	Egypt	Yoon, Eun-Kyung
Ch.6	Algeria	Park, Jae-Yang
Vol. 14	<i>Women's Literature in North Africa and Turkey</i> (2006.4)	
Ch.1	North Africa and Turkey	Jeon, Wan-Kyung
Ch.2	Morocco	Bae, Hye-Kyung
Ch.3	Algeria	Moon, Ae-Hee
Ch.4	Egypt: The World of Salwa Bakr's Work	Kim, Neung-Woo
Ch.5	Modern Feministic Novels in Tunisia	Chang, Se-Won
Vol. 15	<i>The Current Situation and Future Prospects of Religious Movements in North Africa and Turkey</i> (2006.4)	
Ch. 1	North Africa and Turkey	Lee, Hee-Soo
Ch. 2	Egypt	Chang, Byung-Ock
Ch. 3	The Sudan	Yoo, Wang-Jong
Ch. 4	Libya	Lee, Dong-Eun
Ch. 5	Algeria	Hong, Mi-Jung
Ch. 6	Turkey	Woo, Duck-Chan

## II. Tribalism in the Middle East: Its Relationship to Power Elites in the Contemporary Middle East

Total Budget	450 million <i>won</i> (US\$450,000)
Period	3 years (2005.9–2008.8)
Number of Participants	6 Ph.D. holders per year
Published Results	
<i>KAMES</i> 27, no. 1.	
Saudi Arabia	Kum, Sang-Moon
Iran	Yu, Dal-Seung
UAE	Chang, Se-Won
Political Elites and Neo-Tribalism during the Saddam	
Hussein Era	Jung, Sang-Ryul
Jordan	Hong, Mi-Jung
Palestine	M. Satar

## III. Islamic Family Law and the Possibilities of Reform from a Women's Rights Perspective: Changes in Egypt, Tunisia, Iran and Turkey

Total Budget	206.6 million <i>won</i> (US\$206,600)
Period	1 year (2005.9–2006.8)
Number of Participants	5 Ph.D. holders per year

#### IV. Islamic Personal Status Law and the Possibilities of Reform from a Women's Rights Perspective: Changes in Turkey, Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt

Period 1 year (2003.9–2004.8)

Number of Participants 4 Ph.D. holders

##### Research Results

*Journal of Mediterranean Area Studies* 6, no. 1. 2004.

Turkey Kim, Dae-Sung

Tunisia Kim, Hyo-Jung

Morocco Lee, Won-Sam

Egypt Cho, Hee-Sun

*KAMES* 25, no. 1. 2004.

Revised Family Law in Turkey Kim, Dae-Sung

Understanding of Egyptian Intellectuals Concerning Family Law  
Cho, Hee-Sun

#### V. Islamic Awareness and Marriage Practices in Qatar, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey

Period 1 year (2003.9–2004.8)

Number of Participants 2 Ph.D. holders

##### Research Results

*Journal of Mediterranean Area Studies* 7, no. 2. 2005.

Islamic Awareness and Marriage in Qatar, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia  
and Turkey Cho, Hee-Sun, and Kim, Hyo-Jung

#### VI. Women's Participation in New Media and Its Influence on Social Changes in the Gulf Region: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman

Total Budget 274 million *won* (US\$274,600)

Period 2 years (2005.9–2006.8)

Number of Participants 4 Ph.D. holders (per year)

##### Research Results

*KAMES* 27, no. 1. 2006.

Satellite TV and Its Influence on Gender Role Consciousness among  
Qatari Women Cho, Hee-Sun

Satellite TV's Influence on the Perceptions of Social Space among  
the Bahraini Younger

Generation Focusing on Gender Space Eum, Ik-Ran

The Influence of Satellite TV on Women's Understanding about  
Changing Gender Roles in the UAE Kim, Hyo-Jung

*Journal of the Korea Association of Islamic Studies* 16, no. 2. 2006.

Satellite TV and Its Influence on of the Gender Role Consciousness  
among Saudi Women Cho, Hee-Sun

Satellite TV's Influence on the Perceptions of Social Space among  
the Bahraini Younger Generation Focusing on Gender Space  
Eum, Ik-Ran

Satellite TV's Influence on the Identity  
Formation among Kuwaiti Young People Eum, Ik-Ran

#### VII. Arab Ways of Thinking Through Arabic Language Cultural Data: Egypt, Morocco/Tunisia, Levant

Total Budget	450 million <i>won</i> (US\$450,000)
Period	3 years (2005.9–2008.8)
Number of Participants	5 Ph.D. holders (per year)

#### VIII. Mentality as the Underpinning of Deep-Rooted Arab Culture: Egypt, Morocco/Tunisia, Lebanon/Syria

Total Budget	150 million <i>won</i> (US\$150,000)
Period	3 years
Number of Participants	15 Ph.D. holders

#### IX. Women and Modernization Process in the Mediterranean Region: Diversity and Integrity Among Nations in the Area

Total Budget	275 million <i>won</i> (US\$275,000)
Period	2 years (2002.9–2004.8)
Number of Participants	4 Ph.D. holders (per year)

#### X. Comparative Analysis of Arabic Satellite Broadcasting by Al Jazeera, BBC & CNN: News Coverage of the Iraq War

Total Budget	89 million <i>won</i> (US\$89,000)
Period	1 year (2003.12–2004.11)
Number of Participants	6 Ph.D. holders

Research Results

*Journal of Mediterranean Area Studies*, 7, no. 1. 2005.

Comparative Analysis of Arabic Satellite Broadcasting by Al  
Jazeera, BBC & CNN: News Coverage of the Iraq War

Sah, Hee-Man,  
Kong, Ji-Hyun,  
Park, Sun-Hee,  
Oh, Myung-Keun,  
Yoon, Yong-Su, and  
Ihsan Aly Dabbous

### XI. The Image of Korea as Depicted in Arabic Newspapers after the Invasion of Iraq

Total Budget	74 million <i>won</i> (US\$74,000)
Period	1 year (2004.12–2005.11)
Number of Participants	5 Ph.D. holders

### XII. America's "Greater Middle East Initiative" and Counter-Proposals by the Middle Eastern Countries: Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria

Total Budget	37 million <i>won</i> (US\$37,000)
Period	1 year (2005.9–2006.11)
Number of Participants	3 Ph.D. holders

#### Other Projects

- "New Approach to the Crusader"
- "The Influence of Islam in Africa"
- "The Influence of Islam in Central Asian Traditional Culture"
- "Traditional Worship and Taboo in the Middle East"
- "The Application of EU Integration in Turkey"

## EVALUATION AND DISCUSSION

About sixty experts in the field of Islamic and Middle Eastern area studies were recruited for these projects. In particular, they gave young scholars valuable experience doing fieldwork in various Middle Eastern countries.

#### Positive factors

- a. Enlargement of fieldwork experience for young scholars who have been educated mainly in Korea.
- b. Upgraded utility and quality of research combining theory with fieldworks.
- c. Significant financial assistance to Ph.D. holders still looking for fulltime employment.
- d. Academic cooperation among participants based on interdisciplinary approaches.
- e. Further globalization of Islamic area studies through joint research with foreign scholars in Middle Eastern and Western countries.
- f. More comparative study and balanced ideas through travel and fieldwork in different Middle Eastern countries.

In spite of such problems as the division of participants into “project owners” “non-owner, a neglect of basic, theoretical academic approaches due to focusing on given project topics, the above research projects contributed much to establishing appropriate guidelines for Korean society, including the Korean government and the business community, on how to approach the Middle Eastern and Islamic countries properly and most effectively. Furthermore, the mobilization of research-oriented human resources in these areas has lent a great amount of encouragement to students thinking about specializing in related academic fields.

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 ——— 7, no. 2. 2006.
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