

Editorial Statement

We now live in a grim age when the study of the humanities has rapidly lost value in our society. People regard the humanities as an inefficient and unproductive academic discipline. It is undeniable that the study of the humanities neither brings in easy money nor produces obvious tangible outcomes in and of itself. On the contrary, it consumes money through sometimes dubious research that, by all appearances, lacks practicality. Moreover, the outcome of studying the humanities may not be immediately discernable.

Nevertheless, the importance of the humanities cannot be stressed too much. Scholars of the humanities learn to observe an issue from many different angles, mull it over, and discuss it until they reach a reasonable conclusion. At college, courses in the humanities train us to become cultured people so we can embrace cultural differences and diversity. The study of the humanities enables us to understand others, and the world around us, through the learning of literature, history, religion and foreign languages. Through the humanities, we build up our capacity for creative and critical thinking and learn to value humanity and humanism. By studying the humanities, therefore, we can cultivate our minds and broaden our horizons.

What would happen if we completely disparaged the humanities and liberal education at college? A large part of the purpose of college education would fail and our society would become bleak and inhumane. We would be deprived of much of our creative abilities and critical thinking. We would also lose our sense of history and philosophical reasoning, and eventually become hopelessly shallow. We would have much less of a capacity to embrace cultural, racial or ideological differences and thus would antagonize those who are not one of us. We would also not appreciate cultural diversity and would be far more likely to indulge in parochial jingoism and racial prejudice, enslaved in our monochromatic minds.

Recently, however, students' interest in the humanities, as traditionally studied, has sharply declined, reflecting the decline in perceived value that the humanities have suffered in our society. Accordingly, the enrollment figures in the College of Humanities have dropped significantly. In order to stimulate people's interest in the humanities, scholars now turn to the discipline of "cultural studies", which approaches the humanities with reference to their cultural implications, ideology and hegemony. As a result, the study of the humanities these days almost always involves film, gender and ethnic studies. This cultural approach seems to have succeeded, at least partially, in bringing people's interest back to the humanities.

As already argued, the study of the humanities is indispensable for building a better society and world. It helps us comprehend our world, shape our minds, and broaden our horizons. The perceptions and insights with which the study of the humanities provides us surely enrich our lives and our society by encouraging us to ponder over fundamental questions such as "how to make our lives worthwhile," "how to build a better society," and "how to perceive the world we now live in."

Indeed, through the humanities and liberal arts education at college, we can foster open-minded global leaders, ethical scientists and moral financiers. Experts lament that if Wall Street fund managers had been sufficiently exposed to the humanities and had received an essential grounding in ethics and morals, they would not have instigated the financial crisis that shook the world economy a few years ago. Perhaps it was in this context that Dr. Jim Yong Kim, President of the World Bank, once said, "Physics students should be encouraged to read Shakespeare and medical students should engage in the arts and humanities."

At the same time, the humanities should come out of the ivory tower, mingle with the people in the street and contribute to the community. The humanities cannot be relegated to the realm of museums, but should be integrated into our society. Otherwise, it is a natural consequence that people will neither value nor appreciate the humanities and that businessmen will regard their study as useless and redundant.

As an internationally-acclaimed and outstanding academic journal, *Korea Journal* aims to play a vital role in promoting the study of the

humanities by inviting insightful articles on the humanities from international scholars, by featuring special editions on the humanities and by organizing humanities conferences. *Korea Journal* hopes to be a collegial space where humanities scholars from all over the world can meet, mingle and discuss how we should accept and embrace each other despite our differences, and through such activities, play a part in allowing the study of the humanities to regain its valued place and make a marked improvement in our society and the world.

KIM Seong-Kon
Co-Editor