

Won-Kyu Park

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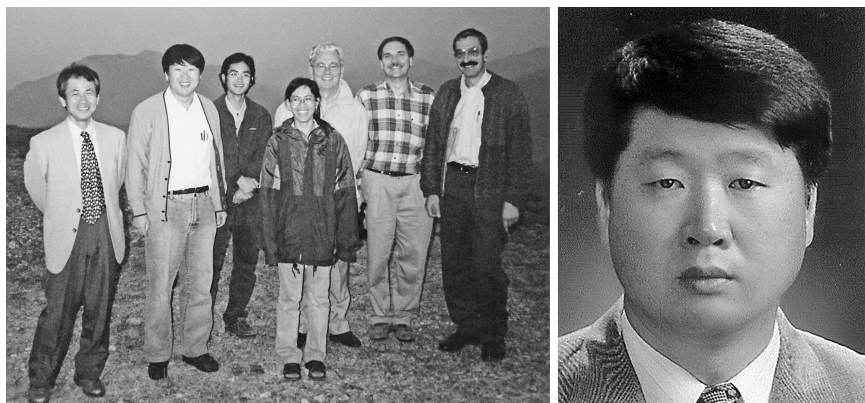
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In Memoriam

Won-Kyu Park

1957–2014



Dr. Won-Kyu Park (second from left) visiting one of his field sites at an International Association of Wood Anatomy Pacific Regional Wood Anatomy Conference in October 1988 with colleagues (from left to right) include Dr. Terutaka Katoh (Japan), Dr. Won-Kyu Park (Korea), Dr. Park's graduate student, Dr. Nathsuda Pumijumnong (Thailand), Dr. Dieter Eckstein (Germany), Dr. Frank Telewski (U.S.A.), and Dr. Alex Shashkin (Russia).

Won-Kyu Park, Vice-chairman of The Korean Society of Conservation Science for Cultural Heritage, Head, Tree-Ring Material Bank, Industry Academic Cooperation Foundation, and Professor, School of Forest Resources, Chungbuk National University, died in his laboratory on Saturday, January 18, 2014. Dr. Park was 56 years old.

Born in South Korea in 1957, Won-Kyu would go on to attend Seoul National University to earn his B.S. in Forest Products in 1980. He continued on at Seoul National University to complete his M.S. in the same subject before applying to the University of Arizona's Laboratory of Tree Ring Research to specialize in dendrochronology as he earned his Ph.D. in Renewable Natural Resources. He arrived in Tucson in 1984 and began his dissertation research where he pioneered the use of video image analysis as a method to extract measurements of wood density based on the ratio of cell wall area to lumen space and applying this wood anatomical methodology to dendroclimatological

interpretation. His interest in this project was well suited for his interests and skills and would provide a foundation for his future research. After completing his Ph.D., Dr. Park returned to South Korea where he assumed the duties of Assistant Professor in the Department of Forest Products, Chungbuk National University, Chungju, South Korea. Within a short four years, he was promoted to Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Forest Products. In 1999, Dr. Park was promoted to Professor. He was internationally recognized authority on dendrochronology and an accomplished wood anatomist. Dr. Park was a passionate and dedicated researcher, teacher, advisor and colleague. He was also very active professionally organizing several international meetings in the region including the East Asia Tree-Ring Workshops, Cheongju (1997, 1998), and the Second Korea-Mongolia Joint Seminars on Global Environmental Changes of Northeast Asia, Seoul (2003).

In the early 1980s, Asia, and especially the Korean Peninsula, were regions with great potential for dendrochronological studies, and over the course of next 25 years Won-Kyu would become a major contributor to the field throughout Eurasia with his multiple and significant contribution to dendroclimatology, dendroecology, and dendroarcheology. Dr. Park was always a gracious host, and many researchers from around the world came to Chungju to visit him and share research. He collaborated with researchers from India (with Ram R. Yadav), Japan (with S. Ohta), China (with Liu Yu), Thailand (Nasthuda Pumijumnong), Russia (with Eugene Vaganov and Alex Shaskin) and Poland (Tomasz Wazny) on multiple regional-scale studies. At the time of his death, Won-Kyu was working on wood/cellular anatomical applications for dendrochronology including species identification, tracheid dimensions and cambium phenology. Dr. Park published more than 90 peer-reviewed papers over the course of his career.

Dr. Park was also an accomplished wood anatomist and applied his skills to many archeological and restoration projects in South Korea. He worked to develop longer chronologies from archaeological woods obtained from historical buildings and wood artifacts in Korea. It was his dedication to this field of study that led to his appointment as Vice-chairman of The Korean Society of Conservation Science for Cultural Heritage in 2012. It was also this branch of work in which he had been engaged at the time of his death. He was asked by his government to lead an investigation into what was referred to in the media as a “botched restoration” of South Korea’s number one national treasure, the Sungnyemun Gate in Seoul (<https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/common/printpreview.asp?categoryCode=148&newsIdx=150111>). Dr. Park apparently took his own life while leading this investigation.

After hearing about Park’s passing, colleague and friend Gene Vaganov, Russian Academy of Science said; “I first met Professor Won-Kyu Park in Tucson in 1988 when he was working on his PhD, then we met again when he had got an appointment as a professor at Chungbuk National University. He suggested me and my colleagues

jointly carry out research on climate change and its effect on tree growth variability on Korean Peninsula. Since 1993 we have been meeting regularly and many of our young researchers undertook internship at Professor Won-Kyu Park’s facility under his supervision. Not only was Professor Won-Kyu Park their supervisor, he was their guru (and language tutor) and a person who being proud of his Motherland and was doing his best in promoting national culture and history. We in our family keep several pictures painted by Ms. Park, and a rich photography collection about Korea of more than a thousand images. The joint research was beneficial for both parties resulting in co-authored publications and close cooperation of young researches of both countries who successfully pursue activity initiated by Professor Won-Kyu Park”. Thomas W. Swetnam, the current director of the Laboratory of Tree Ring Research said; “This is shocking news and makes it all the sadder for those of us who know what a wonderful person Won-Kyu was.” Steve Leavitt, Professor at the LTRR and Editor of Tree Ring Research said; “I am pleased that I had met him in person on more than one occasion and that I worked with him on journal matters including his dendrochronology paper on the temple.” Frank Rinn said in an e-mail after hearing of Park’s death; “I met Won-Kyu personally, knew him for years and I really feel deeply sad about what happened. Now all my good wishes go to his wife and children.” Jim Parks from the LTRR stated; “How saddening. Won-Kyu was a visiting scholar when I first started at the Tree-Ring Lab. I don’t know if you remember, Frank, but you led a field trip to the Rincon Mts. for Graybill’s Central AZ project and Won-Kyu came along. Such a friendly guy. We used to joke that we must be distantly related because of our last names.”

On a personal note, I was a fresh from graduate school Assistant Professor at the Laboratory of Tree Ring Research when Won-Kyu Park arrived in Tucson to start his doctoral studies in my laboratory under my direction. At the time I had a lot of help from Bryant Bannister who coordinated the arrangements for Won-Kyu to come to the United States and study dendrochronology at the LTRR. Those were wonderful years and I was

always impressed with Won-Kyu's knowledge and enthusiasm for the science. I am very proud of what he accomplished during his life and pleased to have known him and mentored him so early in his career. I had the chance to visit Won-Kyu in his home country twice and will always remember fondly the days we spent together, especially the days conducting field work on the tallest mountain in South Korea, Sorak San. I remember stopping off at a Buddhist temple for lunch. The temple was undergoing restoration and many of the old beams were in a pile to be used for cooking firewood. Won-Kyu was so excited about the possibility to

use the timbers in a dendrochronological study and had made arrangements to obtain samples. I will always remember Won-Kyu for such wonderful energy and enthusiasm embraced by a never ending smile.

In his personal life, Won-Kyu was a loved and loving father and husband. He is survived by his wife, Eun-Kyung Seo and his two daughters, Seo-Young Park, Seo-Woon Park. He is missed by family, friends, students, and colleagues around the world.

—Contributed by *Frank W. Telewski*