

The class I wrote this paper for was ENGL368D: Special Topics in the Literature of Africa and the African Diaspora; African American Folklore and Literature. I came up with my topic based on the prompt for the final research paper, which required us to delve into any folklore of our choosing as long as we used a minimum of five sources and cleared the subject with the professor. In class, I learned that oral tradition is a key motif in folklore and so I wanted to gauge for myself how this could impact the tales surrounding the Korean dokkaebi, as I used to grow up hearing stories about the creature.

If you Google search ‘dokkaebi,’ there seems to be a plethora of resources out there on the Internet. However, a closer look will show that many of these are not academic or credible sources, as many of the websites I visited were written based off the Wikipedia page for my subject matter. Thinking my family group chat would be helpful in my research, I asked them about dokkaebi, but my parents replied with the Wikipedia link for the topic; this made me realize that I needed to branch out from my family to find people with less language barriers to English. After realizing that Google searching could only provide me with rudimentary knowledge of my research topic, I searched on the UMD Libraries database for ‘dokkaebi’ just to see what was out there.

For this project, I sought assistance from my higher-up at the Writing Center, Tom Earles, the Assistant Director. Our interactions allowed me to see that I was viewing my topic in a much narrower scope than I thought; a lot of what I was arguing was based on the assumption that my audience would know about Korean history. After he gave me that criticism, I realized that I focused so much on building my argument by the paper’s deadline that I did not inform my audience nearly enough of the context needed to persuade a reluctant reader. This led me to find more historical resources so that I could have a better understanding of Korean history as to better structure my research paper. A major emphasis for this assignment was that we could conduct our own research through interviews, as you will see with the two subjects I’ve included in my preliminary research. Talking to my interviewees actually inspired me to plan out my research strategy so that my evidence and analysis would better support my claims, instead of merely researching as I write.

When I first searched ‘dokkaebi’ on the UMD Libraries website, it yielded more results than I originally thought. However, there were only 76 results found, and when I narrowed down my options based on what I could mostly understand language-wise, this number dropped to 14 available resources. After collaborating with those that assisted me in this project, I reevaluated my research strategy so that I could find more resources pertaining to my topic. Since I recognized the limited amount of academic literature *in English* on the topic, I started to look at the Korean articles on the UMD database. It’s not that I cannot read or understand Korean, but I thought it would be too difficult for me to do ‘academic research’ on the topic in my first language. After I started to explore the Korean sources on the UMD website, I realized that some of the articles were from a Korean database that had over hundreds of available resources with over a hundred on my topic alone. Because the availability of resources relating to my topic had exponentially increased, the selection of sources was based on the following criteria: 1) it had to relate to the dokkaebi, 2) the abstract would describe the research methods of that particular study, or 3) there was some historical context discussing education.

During this research process, I learned more about why representation matters. Considering that that most of the world has been colonized before, this project allowed me to examine an example of where ‘history is written by the victors’ in a sense. The education systems established by colonizers often tend to lean towards a certain view. Learning more about a cultural symbol of my Korean heritage pushed me to examine the educational system that exists in the U.S and how a lot of things in ‘American history’ are often glossed over, especially concerning people of color. These are all facets that I want to learn more about in my both my academic and professional career, because I believe it is crucial to stay cognizant of how history can influence contemporary issues while trying to find solutions for them.

One thing I would change if I could revamp my research experience is that I would have asked a librarian to assist me as well. I recently saw that the East Asian literature section of the library had a vast number of books, and I know that there are specific librarians for particular topics. I feel like I could’ve garnered more support for my project and worked with someone with a skillset that could help me with my research needs. I know that the library has a lot of resources out there but often, I find that professors don’t nearly emphasize this point enough to students besides in ENGL101: Academic Writing. Most students probably don’t even know that there are librarians with specific focuses, so promoting such information could allow the library to better serve more students’ research needs; knowing that there is an underlying support system behind one’s research experience can boost confidence during it.