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DIFFERING CONCEPTIONS OF SPACE AND ITS CONSEQUENT IMPACT IN KOREAN SPACE
POLICY

Abstract

Since its inception in 1989, Korean space development has largely focused on construction of space systems rather than space science and research. This paper tracks this dominance of technical system development in Korean space policy to different understandings and imageries of space by participants in Korean space policy. In the time span of a quarter century, Korea has achieved remarkable success in space development, due to numerous participants devoting their passion and effort to it. These participants held different interests and motivations, however, with some more interested in space systems and others in space science. Still others were attracted to applications of space technology or to humans in space. These varying interests largely mirror the different conceptions held by different participants (including engineers, researchers, and policymakers) of what “space” is. Because Korean space development has been considered the area of experts for a long time, professional societies could represent the different conceptions and interests of participants which have affected Korean space development. The nine influential professional societies in Korean space field were selected to show different understanding of Korean experts and they cover most space related fields of Korean space development from system engineering to application of space technology and to human in space: these nine professional societies include the Korean Space Science Society, the Korean Astronomical Society, the Korean Society for Aeronautical and Space Science, the Satellite Communication Committee in Korea Information and Communication Society, the Korean Society of Remote Sensing, the Aerospace Medical Association of Korea, the Korean Association of Air and Space Law, the Committee of Ultimate Space Construction in Korean Society of Civil Engineers, and the Astrophysics Divisions in the Korean Physical Society. Based on interviews of the presidents of the nine professional societies in Korean space development as well as archival data retrieved from these societies, this study uncovers the influence of the academic background of the major actors of Korean space policy on different perceptions of space and the consequent impacts on specific space plans. In particular, the study reveals that Korean space development has been led by space engineers more than by space scientists and the former’s perception of space as the object to develop and explore rather than understand heavily influenced the design and implementation of various Korean space plans.