

# Korean Studies in the United Kingdom: History and Prospects

## Introduction

Korean studies in the UK began at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. SOAS was initially founded as the School of Oriental Studies in 1916 and established itself as the center of research on Asia and Africa after being renamed its present name, School of Oriental and African Studies in 1938. This article briefly reviews the history and development of Korean studies at SOAS as well as other universities across the UK and discusses future prospects for Korean studies in the UK. It is impossible not to mention William Skillend when talking about the origin and history of Korean studies, not only at SOAS or in the UK but across Europe as well. The first academic position (Lecturer) for a Korean studies in the UK was first created in 1953,<sup>1</sup> and the first person to be appointed as Lecturer of Korean studies at SOAS was William Skillend.<sup>2</sup> The background and experience of Skillend as well as how he embarked upon the path of Korean studies thus goes hand in hand with the beginning of Korean studies in the UK.

## Skillend's Research in Korean Studies

William Skillend was born in Liverpool, UK, on April 26, 1926.<sup>3</sup> Skillend was admitted to Christ's College, University of Cambridge, on a scholarship as a Classics major in 1944, during the height of the Second World War. The

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1 While it is generally known that the first Korean studies course was offered in Europe (excluding Russia) in 1947 at Universiteit Leiden, the Netherlands, the first lectureship position for Korean studies was first created at the University of London in 1953.

2 At that time, Skillend was writing his doctoral dissertation for Japanese studies at the University of Cambridge.

3 For more on Skillend's background, see Jackson 2013; Ahn and Yeon 2016; Yeon 2021.

same year, the British government was seeking to train Japanese language experts, and Skillend responded to the government's call by applying for and entering the British intelligence agency at Bletchley Park. There, he worked for the British government as an agent specializing in the deciphering military codes of the Japanese forces. Skillend recalls that he met Eric Sidel, his Japanese language teacher, for the first time at the agency. In 1947, after the war was over, Skillend had a reunion with Sidel back at Christ's College, where Sidel had been hired as Training Fellow teaching the Japanese language. Having already been acquainted during the war, Skillend was the first student to apply to enter the newly created discipline of Japanese studies and later graduated with First Class Honours in 1950. In 1951, he began his graduate studies at the Japanese studies doctoral program. While studying for his degree at the University of Cambridge, he is said to have visited SOAS and learned the Korean language from visiting scholars from Korea. When the position of Lecturer was created at SOAS, University of London, in 1953, Skillend applied for and secured the job. While teaching at SOAS, he conducted research on the *Man'yōshū* and received his doctorate in 1955 for his study, "The Vocabulary of the *Man'yōshū*." at Cambridge.

Skillend's motivations for conducting research in the field of Korean studies was likely influenced by the academic atmosphere in the UK at that time as well as the British government's needs for policymaking. The University of Cambridge led research in Asian studies during then, and the British government would have needed researchers in the field of Korean studies for policymaking purposes. Around the time Skillend was appointed at SOAS, the Korean War broke out after World War II was over, with the entire world watching closely. The resulting changes in the international situation called for a more in-depth understanding of Korean studies for countries to adequately respond and gather information. After receiving his doctorate in 1955, Skillend visited Korea for the first time, during which he conducted research on Korean literature. From September 1961 to August 1962, his second visit to Korea, he met with Jeong Byeong-uk and Yi Gimun, both professors at the Department of Korean Language and Literature, Seoul National University, and this exchange led him to set foot into Korean studies in earnest. Skillend focused his research on Korean literature and, in 1968, published the book *Kodae sosŏl: A Survey of Korean Traditional Style Popular Novels*. This book, a compilation of all the lists of premodern Korean novels stored in the libraries across Korea,

Europe, and North America, was an essential material for all literary scholars studying Korean premodern literature before the age of the Internet. Following this, Skillend taught Korean literature for a year, from 1963 to 1964, at Columbia University in the United States as a visiting professor, during which he contributed to the establishment of Korean studies at Columbia University. In fact, the Korean studies programme was created at Columbia University after 1963, which was the year when Skillend was teaching there. Upon his return to London, Skillend founded the Association of Korea Studies in Europe (AKSE)<sup>4</sup> in April 1977 and served as president of the association from 1982 to 1984. He retired from the University of London in 1989.

## The Beginnings of Korean Studies in the UK

Early on, starting from the years when it was the British Empire, the UK founded the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland (RAS) in 1824 in London and conducted research on Asia, albeit through the perspective of Orientalism. The association also published the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (JRAS)* quarterly. The Korean branch of RAS was established in 1900. Skillend, a graduate of the University of Cambridge, also participated as a member of the RAS. Most of the Western scholars of Korean studies such as the early pioneers—William Aston, James Gale, Richard Rutt, and Gari K. Ledyard—were active members of the RAS and contributed to the field of Korean studies as part of regional studies of Asia. William Aston in particular, is an important figure in the birth of Korean studies in the UK before Skillend. Born in Ireland, Aston studied Latin, Greek, French, and German at Queen's University Belfast, solidifying his background in philology. Aston was a scholarly diplomat who studied the Japanese language while serving at the British

<sup>4</sup> The Association of Korea Studies in Europe (AKSE) is an academic gathering of scholars conducting research in the field of Korean studies in Europe and was created by Skillend in 1977 together with Frits Vos, Daniel Boucher, Martina Deuchler, Romuald Huszcza, and Yi Ok. Until 1989, Korean studies professors from Western and Eastern Europe came together once a year to present their research. The conference was held biennially starting from 1990, during which Korean studies researchers from North and South Korea also participated in addition to scholars from Europe. The most recent AKSE Conference was held in 2023 at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, and the next is scheduled to be held in 2025 at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. Currently, the president of the AKSE Council is Vladimir Tikhonov, a professor at the University of Oslo, Norway.

consulate in Japan and even wrote a grammar book. In 1884, he was appointed as the British consul-general in Korea. His articles were published in *JRAS* and include “A Comparative Study of the Japanese and Corean Language” in 1879 and “Corean Popular Literature” in 1890. Aston’s enthusiastic efforts to collect ancient literature of Japan and Korea resulted in the installment of the Aston Collection at the Academy of Sciences in Saint Petersburg, Russia, and the University of Cambridge in the UK. The investigation of the woodblock-printed Korean ancient novels, which Aston had not been able to do, was done by Maurice Courant, which became known to the world through the publication of *Bibliographie Coréenne* in 1894.

## The Development of Korean Studies in the UK

### *School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London*

Initially, from the 1950s to the late 1970s, there was no academic community of Korean studies as there is now. Instead, there was only Skillend as Lecturer and a few students who were minoring in Korean studies while majoring in Chinese and Japanese studies. During this period, scholars from other universities in the UK or other countries who were interested in Korean studies would visit SOAS and learn the Korean language from Skillend. These figures included Daniel Boucher, who later became a professor of Korean literature at the Université de Paris in France; Keith Howard, who received his doctorate in ethnomusicology and later taught as a professor at SOAS; and Beth McKillop, who served as the president of the British Association of Korean Studies (BAKS)<sup>5</sup> and worked at

5 The British Association of Korean Studies (BAKS) is formed by scholars, professors, current and past employees of the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office, students, and people among the general public. The association boasts the longest history and most members in the UK. In addition to the biennial BAKS conferences, the association holds workshops during the years the conference is not held. In 1995, the First Joint Conference on East Asian Studies in Britain was held at Newcastle University together with the British Association for Chinese Studies (BACS) and the British Association for Japanese Studies (BAJS), and the papers presented during this event was published in *Papers of the British Association for Korean Studies* (Vol. 7). This Joint East Asian Studies Conference has continued to be held with BACS and BAJS every two to three years ever since. The journal of BAKS was renamed *European Journal of Korean Studies* and is published twice a year. Currently the president of the BAKS Council is Sarah Son at the University of Sheffield.

the British Library. The period between the late 1960s and the mid-1970s was when the two separate Korean governments of North and South Korea were competing to promote and develop Korean studies. As this was before North Korea’s economy started to decline, the country donated or disseminated a large number of academic texts and government publications to academic institutions overseas and competed with South Korean government organizations such as the Korea Research Foundation. The vast amount of North Korean material housed in the library of SOAS shows just how active the North Korean government was in such efforts.<sup>6</sup> By then, the educational institutions and scholars of Korean studies across Europe, who had operated independently until the 1970s, keenly felt the need for a pan-European organization of Korean studies, and as a result, AKSE was founded in 1977. The inaugural meeting was held for four days at SOAS in 1977 with over 40, mainly European, scholars attending.

Skillend was promoted to Professor of Korean studies in 1987, which was also the year when the Centre of Korean Studies was first established at SOAS. The center was created with the support of the Korea Research Foundation and later continued to be supported by the Korea Foundation and the Academy of Korean Studies of South Korea. In 1988, a year before Skillend retired, Martina Deuchler was appointed as Senior Lecturer and laid the groundwork for the second era of Korean studies at SOAS. Deuchler completed her undergraduate studies at Universiteit Leiden in the Netherlands and received her doctorate from Harvard University in the US. She left behind many outstanding achievements in the research of the Joseon dynasty,<sup>7</sup> and the many students who studied under her guidance are currently leading Korean studies all over the world. When Skillend retired in 1989, a call was put out for the positions of Lecturer and Training Fellow to succeed Skillend’s role and continue to advance Korean studies at SOAS. I was appointed that year as Training Fellow, and Ross King was appointed as Lecturer in 1990, marking the start of the developmental era of Korean studies, and with the appointment of Pak Youngsook as Lecturer of Korean art history and Keith Howard as Lecturer of Korean musicology, the

6 A search of the SOAS library collection by the name “Kim Il Sung” brings up 125 items that list him as author (Jackson 2013, 5).

7 Deuchler’s brilliant works include publications such as *Confucian Gentlemen and Barbarian Envoys* (1978), *The Confucian Transformation of Korea* (1992), and *Under the Ancestors’ Eyes* (2015).

stage was set for the golden age of Korean studies at SOAS. In the 2000s, after Deuchler and Pak retired, Anders Karlsson,<sup>8</sup> a specialist of the Joseon dynasty, Grace Koh, who specialized in Korean literature, Charlotte Horlyck,<sup>9</sup> a Korean art history expert, and Owen Miller,<sup>10</sup> a specialist in economic history and the North Korean society, were appointed in succession to lead Korean studies at SOAS up to the present.

### *Korean Studies in the UK besides SOAS*

Scholars and schools conducting research in the field of Korean studies besides SOAS started to emerge in the UK between the late 1970s and 1990s. These schools and scholars mainly focused on the social sciences and came from Sheffield University, University of Leeds, Newcastle University, and Durham University. Among these scholars, those based in northeastern UK whose interests lay in issues such as the relationship between North and South Korea, politics, and economy gathered to create the Yorkshire and Northumbria Korean Studies (YANKS). Aidan Foster-Carter, who taught at the University of Leeds, was a leading member of YANKS and continues to publish in the media and present in seminars as an expert of North-South problems of Korea even now. Another active expert of North Korea in the UK is James Hoare, who served as the first British charge d'affaires in North Korea and taught North Korean studies at SOAS.

### **Sheffield University**

The position of Lecturer of Korean studies was first created at Sheffield University in the early 1980s. A Korean studies course was offered at the university after the school received a five-year fund from the Korea Sanhak Foundation in 1979. In 1987, Sheffield University signed an agreement to run a student exchange program with Yonsei University and, in 1990, created an

academic degree program of Korean studies for the first time. James Grayson, a Korean religion expert who had encountered Korean studies after he was sent as a missionary to Korea, served as the director of the Centre for Korean Studies at Sheffield University before he retired. Judith Cherry, who specialized in the research of business relationships between Korea and the UK, taught Korean and Korean business at the university for a long time and was awarded the Member of British Empire by the Crown for her contribution in this field. She is also long retired. Afterwards, many scholars specializing in film studies, international politics, and Korean-Japan relations conducted their research at Sheffield University and currently, a new generation of young faculty members—specialists in North-South relations, anthropology, modern and contemporary Korean history, development economics, and ethnomusicology—are leading the second golden age of Korean studies at Sheffield University. Among them is Sarah Son, who heads the research of Korean studies at Sheffield University and has been newly appointed as the president of BAKS, thus playing a leading role in Korean studies across the UK. There are also Hyunkyong Chang, who researches Korean hymns and socialization; Derek Kramer, a specialist of modern and contemporary Korean history who is also interested in the history of science and technology of East Asia during the 20<sup>th</sup> century; and Mike Prentice, an expert in business and Korean corporate culture who recently published his book *Supercorporate: Distinction and Participation in Post-Hierarchy South Korea*. This book has also been translated into Korean under the title *Chogieop: hamkke mirae reul yeoreo gal Han'guk gieop gwa MZ sedae reul wihayeo*. In addition, Jo Kahee and Im Yookyong have also recently joined as members of the faculty of the Centre of Korean Studies. Sheffield University ranks first in terms of the number of full-time faculty members of Korean studies and continues to be actively engaged.

### **University of Oxford**

Korean studies at the University of Oxford began in 1994 with the support of the Korea Foundation.<sup>11</sup> However, students cannot receive an undergraduate degree with Korean studies alone, and Korean studies is taught as a minor

8 Anders Karlsson, who succeeded Deuchler, specialized in the politics and social and institutional history of the Joseon dynasty.

9 Charlotte Horlyck succeeded Pak Youngsook and specialized in art history of the Goryeo dynasty.

10 Owen Miller specialized in the economic history of the Joseon dynasty and contributes to the research of East Asian materialism and North-South relations of Korea.

11 Korean language courses and a language lectorship position at Oxford were initially started by the University fund from around 1987.

offered to students majoring in Japanese studies or Chinese studies. The university, though, has a master's and doctoral programme in the area of Korean studies and has continued to produce students with a master's degree every year after the first student to have a master's degree in the area of Korean studies graduated in 1996. The university is also trying hard to secure funding to elevate their undergraduate Korean studies into an independent programme through which students can earn a degree. Students majoring in Japanese or Chinese studies in addition to Korean studies majors and graduate students studying Korean language and literature or Korean history take Korean language courses. The University of Oxford once decided to discontinue their Korean studies programme due to financial difficulties but instead ultimately sacrificed the position of a Japanese history professor in 2005 to create the first position of a Lecturer of Korean studies, specifically, of Korean history. In other words, the Japanese studies scholars at the university judged that it was necessary to maintain the Korean studies programme and sacrificed the position of a professor of Japanese premodern history to keep Korean studies alive. (Lewis 2007, 399). In 2006, a new position for a Lecturer of Korean linguistics was created with the support of the Korea Foundation and Sisa yeongeosa (currently, YBM), providing a solid foundation for further development. James Lewis, who received his doctoral degree from the University of Hawai'i, teaches Korean history and premodern Korean literature, while Jieun Kiaer teaches linguistics. Simon Barnes-Sadler, who received his doctorate from SOAS, has also recently joined as a faculty member. The task the university faces now is to create a position for a Lecturer of Korean literature, which will allow the school to create an undergraduate degree programme for Korean studies.

### Other Universities

The University of Cambridge, following the University of Oxford's lead, created a full-time faculty position in Korean studies around 2000 and offered a Korean studies course. The Korean language course, however, is taught by a part-time instructor. Since there is only one full-time faculty member in Korean studies, the field continues to hold a somewhat precarious status compared to the University of Oxford. The University of Cambridge teaches subjects related to Korean history and Korean culture and is home to Nuri Kim, who specializes in Korean history and religion, and John Nilson Wright, who studies issues related

to international politics between Japan and Korea and is actively involved in the Korea-related programme of Chatham House, a think tank in the UK.

The history of Korean studies at Durham University began in 1974 with a course on traditional Korean music. This continued into the 1980s and developed into a more comprehensive course on Korean history and culture. In the 1990s, Robert Provine, an expert of Korean traditional music and court music, taught at the school as a musicology professor. Keith Pratt, originally a Chinese studies specialist, also left behind many achievements in Korean studies and strove to advance the field in the UK, including serving as the president of BAKS. In 1996, Gina Barnes, an expert of Japanese archaeology who had shown an interest in Korean archaeology, was appointed as a professor of East Asian studies and further vitalized Korean studies at the school, but East Asian studies, including Korean studies, was closed in 2003 due to financial difficulties the school was experiencing then. This event symbolized the precarious status of East Asian studies in the UK during the early 2000s.

In 1991, Newcastle University in the UK and Kyung Hee University in South Korea signed an agreement that allowed students to minor in Korean or to take it as one of their majors. Although a Korean language course was offered thanks to the support of the Korea Research Foundation in 1991 and the Korea Foundation until 1996, Newcastle University discontinued their Korean language course in 2004.

Throughout the 1990s and up until the mid-2000s, Korean studies in the UK went through ups and downs due to financial issues, including the discontinuation of Korean studies courses at Durham University and Newcastle University. It was only after the Korean Wave phenomenon and K-pop fervor reached Europe in the 2010s that Korean studies was revived and started booming.

### *Popularity of Korean Studies after the Mid-2010s*

The popularity of Korean studies suddenly soared in tandem with the Korean Wave phenomenon and the rise of K-pop and K-drama after the mid-2010s, resulting in the creation of Korean studies courses and degree programmes at many universities in the UK, such as at the University of Central Lancashire, Coventry University, York St John University, University of Leeds, and King's College London.

### University of Central Lancashire

A Korean studies course was offered during the early 2010s at the University of Central Lancashire and once saw up to 100 students who were in the same year, but recently, it is undergoing restructuring after the decrease in the number of enrolled students. After the UK left the European Union (EU), the number of European students studying abroad in the UK has shrunk, negatively impacting the competitiveness of Korean studies courses at universities across the UK in terms of recruiting new students. Although the International Institute of Korean Studies at the university created a master's program in North Korean studies and began to run the Sejong Institute Korean Language Programme from 2020, the master's program is currently facing possible closure due to restructuring. Sojin Lim is in charge of the field of social studies at the institute including the master's program in North Korean studies, while another member oversees the Sejong Institute. Sojin Lim specializes in Official Development Assistance (ODA) and research related to North Korea. The undergraduate courses are run by Hae Sung Jeon, who has a PhD in linguistics (phonetics); Chen Xi, who received her PhD in East Asian linguistics from SOAS and is a pragmatics specialist; and other full-time faculty as well as Korean language instructors.

### University of Edinburgh

In 2019, the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, created a master's program in Korean studies. Youngmi Kim, a politics major, is leading efforts to create an undergraduate programme as well. In addition to Youngmi Kim, who conducts research on politics, gender, elections, and municipal administration, there is also Holly Stephens, an economic history major who specializes in Korean history and has conducted research of the rice economy in late Joseon based on peasants' diaries during then, and Robert Winstanley-Chesters, who was appointed thanks to the research funds provided by the Core Universities Research Fund of the Academy of Korean Studies. Winstanley-Chesters studies North Korean geographic ecology and serves as the managing editor of the *European Journal of Korean Studies*.

### Other

York St John University also created an undergraduate Korean language course and appointed Yeji Han, a Korean Language Education major who is trying to further advance Korean studies. The University of Leeds created a Korean language course, albeit not part of any major, and appointed Cuie Xu, a Chinese national who received a PhD from Seoul National University. Cuie Xu's active efforts include cooperating with other Korean lecturers and instructors throughout the UK to hold academic conferences in order to create the British Association of Korean Language Education (BAKLE). The founding of BAKLE will be able to work together with the already active European Association of Korean Language Education (EAKLE)<sup>12</sup> and carry out academic programmes for Korean language educators. At Coventry University, Eunju Hwang led efforts to create the Korea Centre and made preparations to offer a Korean studies course. On October 9, 2020, the Korea Centre at Coventry University held the International Conference on Korea's Global Position online (Hwang 2019), but currently, the center appears to be inactive. Besides these examples, Korean language courses are offered at King's College London, Imperial College London, and Warwick University as well.

### Research Trends and Characteristics of Korean Studies in the UK

Korean Studies in the UK is diverse and actively ongoing. In the humanities, fields such as history, North Korean studies, music, culture, the Korean Wave, literature, and linguistics are steadily popular, while many social

12 The European Association of Korean Language Education (EAKLE) is formed by professors and lecturers of Korean language education in European universities. It first held its inaugural general assembly in 2007 at the University of Warsaw, Poland. Since 2008, the EAKLE has held its general assembly and research presentation biennially at Ankara Üniversitesi, Türkiye; SOAS, University of London; Charles University, Czech; Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy; Copenhagen University, Denmark; University of Helsinki, Finland; and Aix-Marseille University, France (online). The assembly for 2024 has been held at Università per Stranieri di Siena, Italy. Opinions and ideas regarding Korean language education is exchanged via the Internet and their website. The first president of EAKLE was Romuald Huszcza, and currently, Tomas Horak of Charles University, Czech, is serving as president.

scientists continue to publish their work. Many academics studying political science, comparative politics, economics, political economy, urban planning, administration, geography, international relations, and North Korea are based in many universities throughout the UK, even in schools that do not have a Korean studies programme. In the past, Korean studies in the UK and Europe in general tended to see brilliant research achievements in the humanities, specifically in the areas of history, language, and literature of Korea. Social sciences, on the other hand, did not confine itself to the boundaries of Korean studies and instead tended to be scattered across many universities mostly as independent research that looked at Korea as a case study. This is both due to the characteristics of social science as well as the result of how degree programmes in Korean studies were mostly developed around Korean language and history. Another characteristic of Korean studies in the UK is its active research on the Korean Wave and the relatively large number of scholars conducting research on North Korea. The UK continued its exchange with North Korea even when the latter was internationally isolated. The British embassy is in North Korea and vice versa. James Hoare, the first British *chargé d'affaires* to reside in North Korea and currently retired, is one of the many people who left behind a considerable mark in Korean studies. Hazel Smith, though also retired, is a Research Associate at SOAS and continues her research on North Korea. She is the figure who set up the basis for the master's programme in North Korean studies at the University of Central Lancashire.

In the case of SOAS, after figures forming generation 1.5 of Korean studies, such as Martina Deuchler, Pak Youngsook, Keith Howard, and myself, retired, the succeeding generation of Korean studies continues to be actively involved in the field. At one point, over 10 Korean studies specialists including humanities majors in Korean linguistics, literature, history, or art history and social science majors in politics, economy, or North-South Korea relationships formed the key members of the Centre of Korean Studies at SOAS and carried out the role as the largest hub of Korean studies in Europe. Although recent restructuring has led to the loss of several members of the faculty, East Asian studies and the Centre of Korean Studies continue to maintain the tradition of research. The number of incoming students has also steadily risen, surpassing the number of incoming students of Chinese studies from 2018 and Japanese studies from 2020, consequently taking the position as the language with the highest number of incoming students not only in East Asian studies but

across SOAS. While this is remarkable progress compared to when I first started teaching at SOAS in 1989, when there was one new student majoring in Korean studies and two students minoring in the subject, it is a tragedy that despite such an increase in incoming students, the Faculty of Languages, Cultures, and Linguistics, which includes East Asian studies, must always find itself in a precarious situation in face of continuing financial difficulties of the school. The fact that regional studies does not have a hopeful future is quite depressing. No matter how much the number of incoming students rises, the Faculty of Languages, Cultures, and Linguistics has less students in total compared to the Faculty of social sciences such as law, politics, or economics. In addition, the language education that is necessary for the regional studies major requires a large number and amount of human and financial resources, which adds to the financial burden of the university. This is an issue that Korean studies, as regional studies, must resolve in order to survive the overall market economy environment surrounding universities in the 21st century. It is inevitable for universities under the neoliberal economic system to worry about their financial situation, and under such circumstances, the status of Korean language education and their educators within Korean studies department can only find itself constantly at risk. For the position of the study of the Korean language to become more solid within Korean studies, the most desirable situation would be for Korean language not only be taught but also researched by full-time professors who can serve as advisors for the next generation of scholars of the Korean language. The reality is, however, that there are not that many universities at the present with a professorial position for the study of the Korean language.<sup>13</sup> Instead, the language is being taught by instructors whose main job is to teach with no research, and such Korean language programmes have limitations in providing guidance to graduate students in a master's or doctorate programme. It also does not resolve the problem of the relatively precarious position of language educators. The importance of linguistics as a

13 Currently, the only schools that have a position for a professor of Korean language and/or linguistics is the University of Oxford and the University of Central Lancashire. Between the two, the latter does not have a doctoral programme, which means the only school where students can receive a doctorate in the Korean language and linguistics is the University of Oxford. In Europe overall, the only universities with a full-time faculty position for Korean language or Korean language education are Université Paris Diderot (Paris 7), France; Charles University, Czech; University of Helsinki, Finland; and University of Warsaw, Poland.

research subject for Korean studies is increasingly weakening, and language education is becoming a tool for communication. This may be an irreversible global trend. Finally, for Korean studies and the Korean language to be maintained and further advanced, there should be a consistently sufficient number of undergraduate students majoring in these subjects. This requires not only an academic approach and scholarly efforts but also effectively making use of the popularity of popular culture such as K-pop or the Korean Wave to sustain and lead interest in Korean studies.

## Prospects and Tasks

Around the late 2010s, interest in Korean studies surged incredibly among incoming undergraduate students thanks to K-pop and the popularity of the Korean boy band BTS. Just how much this popularity will continue, however, and whether Korean studies will be able to consistently produce academic achievements and further advance is hard to predict. SOAS in particular, underwent large-scale restructuring due to financial difficulties, which were amplified by Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic. Even though Korean studies itself saw a steady rise in incoming students, the area was subject to a complete curriculum reorganization together with other regional studies. Asian and African regional studies, which began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a strategic fostering policy to efficiently manage colonies and acquire international information, went through a period of development under the name of regional studies after the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and has now reached a new turning point in the 21st century. Interest in knowledge of the humanities centered on language, culture, or history has declined, while interest in popular culture or films has increasingly taken root. Regional studies are more often utilized as a case study of social science such as politics, economics, and society.

The interest in and education of the Korean language has shifted to the perspective that views a language less as a subject of research in linguistics or any other academic fields and more as an instrumental course that is taken for practical purposes or communication. Languages are taught by instructors exclusively hired for teaching. Such changes go along the same lines as the closure of minority or special language studies that have traditionally been maintained at SOAS. Korean literature and history are now no longer a separate

area of Korean studies but part of courses on East Asia, and its contents have largely been replaced by popular film and media studies. It is difficult to criticize these trends simply from the perspective of good or evil or the imperative to maintain balance between academic fields given that they are efforts to respond to the demands and trends of the times. The financial crises faced by universities in the present make it hard to predict how the fate of Korean studies as regional studies will be affected in the future. The research and education of Korean studies clearly needs to change and adapt to the new century.

Presuming that Korean studies as regional studies will continue to exist for a while, there are a few problems and pressing tasks that should be addressed. First of all, young scholars from the next generation holding doctoral degrees in Korean studies need to be raised locally. Although K-pop and the Korean Wave have led to the rise in the number of undergraduate students to an astonishing extent, the number of graduate students pursuing a master's degree or doctorate in Korean studies has not yet increased to such levels. Graduate students should be given scholarships, and more full-time academic faculty positions in Korean studies should be secured so that those holding doctorates can find jobs after they graduate. Second, more positions of lecturer, or assistant professor's, for local researchers overseas should be secured, and Korea should continue to maintain and expand support of overseas universities and local scholars. Securing more of such academic positions means that there should be a corresponding supply of qualified researchers who have produced and will continue to produce internationally competitive accomplishments in their research. These young researchers who hold doctoral degrees should be able to continue their research until they are able to find full-time faculty positions through more postdoctoral fellowships. Third, Korean studies has reached the point at which the quality, in addition to the quantity, of researchers warrants more serious consideration. Although the number of Korean studies scholars has greatly increased compared to the past, the quantity and quality of Korean studies lag behind markedly in comparison to Chinese studies or Japanese studies in terms of academic symposiums or publications. Korean studies researchers need to grow both in quality and in number.<sup>14</sup> Fourth,

<sup>14</sup> The problem with Korean studies in the UK is that it still does not have a wide enough base in terms of research. There are also not that many scholars who are active members of the BAKS who are purely specialized in Korea. Some, for instance, expand their research interests to Korean studies after



balanced development must be maintained among different fields as well as among different areas within the same field, such as between social sciences and humanities, among history, literature, and language within the humanities, between premodern and modern history, literature, and languages, and between classical and contemporary literature. North America and Europe show slight differences in terms of the tradition and current state of balanced development among different fields in Korean studies. Korean studies in Europe show a relative shortage of social science experts but has relatively numerous premodern history specialists when compared to North America. Finally, fifth, the conflict between theoretical studies and Korean studies as regional studies needs to be harmoniously resolved. In universities across Europe, Korean studies is usually created as one of the regional studies and sometimes clashes with theoretical studies such as social science or linguistics in terms of methodology. Korean studies should continue to develop while maintaining a productive tension in the relationship between regional studies and theoretical studies.

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majoring in Chinese or Japanese studies due to personal interest or to secure more opportunities for research grants. Even though the ability to read and interpret Korean primary sources is essential for in-depth research in Korean studies, many who claim to be specialists of Korean studies are lacking in their proficiency in the Korean language. This is not only a problem of the UK or Europe but also scholars in North America. Training young scholars currently in graduate programmes of Korean studies to be proficient in the Korean language is crucial for the future development of Korean studies.

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