Backing for Korean Studies - Korean Studies at Goethe University receives € 700,000

Korean Studies at Goethe University is one of what are known as “rare disciplines” (subjects with a small number of professors taught in only a few locations), so it is all the more impressive that it has now secured € 700,000 in third-party funding. The money is being invested in the project “Cultivating diversity: The global in Korea, Korea in the global” and should contribute to advancing teaching, research and regional collaboration in the field of Korean Studies.

Since 2010, there has been an area studies section at Goethe University dedicated to Korean Studies, hosted by the Institute of East Asian Philology. The number of students has risen from 20 at the outset to 400 today – and interest is continuing to grow, says Yonson Ahn, who, as the only professor for this subject, teaches Korean culture and society at the university. With the support of third-party funding, she can now better meet the growing demand for courses in this subject. The Academy of Korean Studies (AKS) has pledged around € 700,000 in funding for the next five years, which will be invested in research, teaching and outreach.

“I’m very pleased about this successful acquisition of third-party funds. Korean Studies is a rare discipline with considerable appeal. Thanks to Professor Ahn, Goethe University has made a name for itself in this field beyond geographical borders,” says Professor Bernhard Brüne, Goethe University’s vice president for research. The funds, provided by the South Korean Ministry of Education, are intended to boost Korean Studies abroad (from a Korean perspective – “Empowering Korean Studies through innovative education, research and regional cooperation in Germany”). Apart from Goethe University, the University of Oxford was the only other European beneficiary awarded funding in 2021. The Frankfurt research project deals with ethnic and cultural diversity in Korea and in Korean populations in other countries. The title is: “Cultivating diversity: The global in Korea, Korea in the global”.

Funding approval was preceded by two successfully completed projects financed with third-party funds within the Seed Programme for Korean Studies, which each ran for three years – from 2015 to 2021. Their purpose too was research and the further development of the Korean Studies programme. Within the framework of the Korean Studies Promotion Programme of the AKS, Korean Studies at Goethe University has now qualified for the follow-up project “Core University Programme for Korean Studies”, which will last five years – from June 2021 to May 2026.

In this project, Korean Studies in Frankfurt, headed by Professor Ahn, is working closely together with Korean Studies at the University of Hamburg under Professor Yvonne Schulz Zinda and Korean Studies at the University of Bonn under Junior Professor Nadeschda Bachem. The aim, in particular, is to establish a comprehensive cross-university network between the institutes in order to further develop teaching, support for early career researchers, public relations work and joint research projects, and in so doing also boost Korean Studies within the Interdisciplinary Centre for East Asian Studies (IZO) at Goethe University.
In the area of teaching, new seminars are to be designed and implemented within the framework of the project and digital teaching expanded. To support young students, the intention is to jointly supervise their master’s theses and doctoral dissertations. In addition, there are plans to work together more closely with secondary school pupils. In order to make Korean Studies more visible, special attention will be given to public relations work. Low-threshold offers should facilitate access to topics in the field of Korean Studies.

A total of nine further researchers are working on a broad spectrum of interdisciplinary, transnational and intersectional topics in the framework of the project “Cultivating diversity: The global in Korea, Korea in the global” led by Yonson Ahn. Migration, gender, art and media, among others, are featured topics.

Goethe University remains Hessen’s only university with a focus on area studies in Asian studies. After other Asia-related institutes were transferred to Frankfurt in 2008, the Interdisciplinary Centre for East Asian Studies (IZO) was established at the university. Since then, Korean Studies has grown in significance both qualitatively and quantitatively. Students can start the Korean Studies programme without any previous knowledge. Apart from the language itself, the programme also covers the country’s politics, culture and literature. Professor Yonson Ahn attributes its great popularity to the success of Korean film and pop culture, such as the boy band BTS or the films Parasites and Minari, which have won Oscars as well as prizes in Cannes. Graduates definitely have good future prospects: Frankfurt is home to the second largest number of Korean expatriates in Europe, while a large number of Korean companies, a Korean trade agency (KOTRA) and a Korean consulate are located in the city.

A photograph of Professor Yonson Ahn can be downloaded from: www.uni-frankfurt.de/103380737

Caption: Professor Yonson Ahn teaches Korean culture and society at Goethe University Frankfurt.

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