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CURRENT STATUS OF KOREAN STUDIES INFRASTRUCTURE AND EDUCATION IN THE CIS REGION: A FOCUS ON MAJOR CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES

This study presents the findings of the first year (June 2025–May 2026) of the Korean Studies research group at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University. The purpose of this study is to examine the state of Korean Studies education infrastructure in Central Asia (faculties/departments, number of teaching staff (professors/instructors) and students, Korean Studies textbooks and clubs, the status of Korean Studies projects, etc.), which has achieved significant qualitative and quantitative growth since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Immediately after independence, departments of Korean language and Korean Studies were established at Central Asian universities, and systematic education in Korean Studies became widespread. Furthermore, the «Hallyu» (Korean Wave) phenomenon increased interest in Korea and the Korean language, which had a significant impact on the development of Korean Studies. This led to the establishment of university centers for Korean Studies in major cities of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Using Korean studies literature published 10 years ago and basic Korean studies information obtained more recently (as of 2025), The author conducted a comparative analysis of the state of Korean studies infrastructure at leading Central Asian universities specializing in Korean studies. This study confirmed that the number of existing universities responsible for teaching Korean language and Korean studies has remained stable or is increasing, and that leading universities in Kazakhstan (Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Kazakh Ablai Khan University of International Relations and World Languages), Uzbekistan (Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies), and Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek National University named after Karasayev) continue to lead the field of Korean studies in Central Asia. Furthermore, compared to 10 years ago, the number of teaching staff and, in particular, students studying Korean studies has increased significantly, confirming the rapid growth of Korean studies in Central Asia.

Keywords: Korean Studies, Korean Studies in Kazakhstan, Korean Studies in Central Asia, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Hallyu (Korean Wave).

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ТМД аймағындағы корейтану инфрақұрылымы мен білім берудің қазіргі жағдайы: Орталық Азияның негізгі елдеріне бағдарлану

Бұл зерттеуде Әл-Фараби атындағы Қазақ ұлттық университетіндегі корейтану зерттеу тобының алғашқы жылының (2025 жылғы маусым – 2026 жылғы мамыр) нәтижелері ұсынылған. Зерттеудің мақсаты – Кеңес Одағы ыдырағаннан бері айтарлықтай сапалық және сандық өсім көрсеткен Орталық Азиядағы корейтану білім беру инфрақұрылымының жағдайын (факультеттер/кафедралар, оқытушылар мен студенттер саны, корейтану оқулықтары мен үйірмелері, корейтану жобаларының жағдайы және т.б.) зерттеу. Тәуелсіздік алғаннан кейін бірден Орталық Азия университеттерінде корей тілі немесе корейтану кафедралары құрылды, ал корейтану саласындағы жүйелі білім беру кең тарады. Сонымен қатар, «Халлю» (корей толқыны) құбылысы Корея мен корей тіліне деген қызығушылықты арттырды, бұл корейтанудың дамуына айтарлықтай әсер етті. Бұл Қазақстанның, Өзбекстанның және Қырғызстанның ірі қалаларында корейтану бойынша университеттер орталықтарының құрылуына әкелді. 10 жыл бұрын жарияланған корейтану әдебиеттерін және жақында алынған корейтану туралы негізгі ақпаратты (2025 жылғы жағдай бойынша) пайдалана отырып, автор корейтануға мамандандырылған Орталық Азияның жетекші университеттеріндегі корейтану инфрақұрылымының жағдайына салыстырмалы талдау жүргізді. Бұл зерттеу корей тілі мен корейтануды оқытуға жауапты қолданыстағы университеттер санының тұрақты болып қалғанын немесе артып келе жатқанын растады, ал Қазақстандағы

жетекші университеттер (Әл-Фараби атындағы Қазақ ұлттық университеті, Абылай хан атындағы Қазақ халықаралық қатынастар және әлем тілдері университеті), Өзбекстандағы (Ташкент мемлекеттік шығыстану университеті) және Қырғызстандағы (Қарасаев атындағы Бішкек ұлттық университеті) корейтану саласында Орталық Азияда көшбасшылықты жалғастыруда. Сонымен қатар, 10 жыл бұрынғымен салыстырғанда, корейтанумен айналысатын оқытушылар құрамының, атап айтқанда, студенттердің саны айтарлықтай өсті, бұл Орталық Азиядағы корейтанудың қарқынды өсуін растайды.

Түйін сөздер: корейтану, Қазақстандағы корейтану, Орталық Азиядағы корейтану, Әл-Фараби атындағы Қазақстан ұлттық университеті, Халлю (Корей толқыны).

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Текущее состояние инфраструктуры и образования в области корееведения в регионе СНГ: с акцентом на основные страны Центральной Азии

В данном исследовании представлены результаты первого года (июнь 2025 – май 2026) работы исследовательской группы по корееведению в Казахском национальном университете им. аль-Фараби. Цель исследования – изучение состояния инфраструктуры образования в области корееведения в Центральной Азии (факультеты/кафедры, количество преподавателей и студентов, учебники и клубы по корееведению, статус проектов по корееведению и т. д.), которая достигла значительного качественного и количественного роста после распада Советского Союза. Сразу после обретения независимости в университетах Центральной Азии были созданы кафедры корейского языка или корееведения, и систематическое образование в области корееведения получило широкое распространение. Кроме того, феномен «Халлю» (корейская волна) усилил интерес к Корее и корейскому языку, что оказало значительное влияние на развитие корееведения. Это привело к созданию университетов-центров корееведения в крупных городах Казахстана, Узбекистана и Кыргызстана. На основе литературы по корееведению, опубликованной 10 лет назад, и базовой информации о корееведении, полученной относительно недавнего времени (по состоянию на 2025 год), автор провел сравнительный анализ состояния инфраструктуры по корееведению ведущих университетов Центральной Азии, специализирующихся на корееведении. В результате было подтверждено, что количество существующих университетов, ответственных за преподавание корейского языка и корееведения, стабильно сохраняется или увеличивается, а ведущие университеты Казахстана (Казахский национальный университет им. аль-Фараби, Казахский университет международных отношений и мировых языков имени Абылай хана), Узбекистана (Ташкентский государственный университет востоковедения) и Кыргызстана (Бишкекский национальный университет им. Карасаева) продолжают лидировать в области корееведения в Центральной Азии. Кроме того, по сравнению с 10 годами назад значительно выросло количество преподавателей и, в частности, студентов, занимающихся корееведением, и эти данные подтверждают быстрый рост корееведения в Центральной Азии.

Ключевые слова: корееведение, корееведение в Казахстане, корееведение в Центральной Азии, Казахский национальный университет имени аль-Фараби, Халлю (корейская волна).

Introduction

The history of Korean studies in the CIS dates back to the era of Imperial Russia. Korean studies, which emerged during the late Imperial period, reached a high level in both quantity and quality by the 1970s during the Soviet era. At that time, due to the Cold War, education and research were largely conducted for political purposes targeting North Korea, and related institutions and scholars were concentrated in Russia, including Moscow, Saint Petersburg, and Vladivostok. Central Asia,

which was merely a peripheral region at the time, lacked specialized research institutions and consisted mainly of individual researchers; however, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, research on Korean studies began in earnest not only in Russia but also in the former constituent republics of the Soviet Union.

The origins of Korean studies in Central Asia can be roughly traced back to the late 1980s, during the period of Gorbachev's reform and opening-up policies. Early Korean studies were grounded in research on the history, culture, and language

of the Koryoin diaspora (Korean diaspora in CIS), and gradually expanded to include fields such as the Korean language, history and culture, folklore, and linguistics. This expansion was driven by the increasing exchanges and cooperation with Korea following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Throughout the 1990s, departments of Korean language and literature were established in some Central Asian universities, and Korean studies education and research began in earnest as courses focusing on the Korean language, history, culture, and literature commenced. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan are cited as representative countries for Korean studies in Central Asia. Particularly, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (hereinafter referred to as 'Al-Farabi KazNU') and Kazakh Ablai Khan University of International Relations and World Languages (hereinafter referred to as 'KazUIR&WL'), Nizami Pedagogical University and Tashkent University of Oriental Studies in Uzbekistan, and Bishkek University of Humanities and Kyrgyz National University in Kyrgyzstan are representative educational institutions leading Korean studies in the Central Asian region. Meanwhile, Korea's national brand, economic growth, and enhanced status have had a significant impact on the growth and revival of Korean studies in the CIS region. Furthermore, the Korean Wave, which began to spread in earnest in the 2000s, can also be said to have had a considerable influence on the quantitative and qualitative growth of Korean studies education and research. As a result, over the past 30 years, the field of Korean studies education in Central Asia has produced many experts and researchers with bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees, and numerous research papers and books have been published.

Justification of the choice of article and goal and objectives

Over the past 30 years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Korean studies educational institutions and researchers in Central Asia have established mutual exchanges and networks. In the educational settings of Korean studies across Central Asian countries, diverse information on Korean studies infrastructure (universities, departments, student numbers, exchange student programs, employment status, etc.), as well as research outputs, research on the Koryoin diaspora, and Hallyu (Korean Wave) content, have been produced and accumulated. However, there have been restrictions and difficulties in researchers' free access, sharing, and

utilization of this valuable humanities information on Korean studies, which has consequently limited the ability to conduct more in-depth and balanced research on Korean studies in Central Asia. Accordingly, the Korean studies research team at Al-Farabi KazNU has taken the first step in carrying out various projects for the advancement of Korean studies, supported by an overseas academic institution (the Academy of Korean Studies), to be conducted over total five years (June 2025-May 2030). In this process, the research team will collect, on an annual basis, 1) infrastructure information on Korean studies educational sites in Central Asia, 2) research outputs on Korean studies, 3) research outputs on the Koryoin diaspora, and 4) research outputs on Hallyu (Korean Wave) content. The collected Korean studies information will be converted into a database, and a utilization platform is ultimately planned to be established. This paper focuses on the research outputs from the first year (June 2025-May 2026), specifically regarding diverse infrastructure information on Korean studies educational sites in Central Asian countries. Meanwhile, the outcomes of this five-year project are expected to lead to the comprehensive compilation of information on the humanities landscape of the Central Asian Korean Studies Belt. Furthermore, the establishment of the information database and platform will facilitate access to Korean studies information for all those interested in Korean studies in Central Asia; this is expected to make a significant contribution to systematizing the foundation of Korean studies education and research in Central Asia and expanding the horizons of research.

Research Methodology

Before understanding the history and development process of Korean studies in major Central Asian countries, the author briefly examined the basic information and educational status of Korean studies in major CIS countries. First, the basic information and educational status of Korean studies in major CIS countries, excluding Central Asia, were examined based mainly on research materials from 10 years ago. Second, for the study of information on the infrastructure of Korean studies in the Central Asian region, which is the main subject of this paper, The author utilized research outputs (new materials) secured from June 2025 to the present, and the paper was written with greater emphasis on the Central Asian region. As mentioned earlier, the Over-

seas Korean Studies Research Project at Al-Farabi KazNU is conducted over a period of five years. In the first year, emphasis was placed on collecting information on Korean studies infrastructure in five Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan). Information on Korean studies infrastructure held by universities in each Central Asian country (such as the number of teaching staff and student numbers, project status, student club status, library resources, and graduation thesis topics) was collected within a realistic scope, taking into account various possible scenarios (all collected information is stored in a database format in Excel files, and all of this data is used to build a platform that facilitates future searching and utilization). Meanwhile, the information collection was carried out based on the network of universities in Central Asia offering Korean studies programs, which is maintained by the Korean Studies research team at Al-Farabi KazNU, to which the author belongs.

Information on Korean Studies Infrastructure in Major CIS Countries (Excluding Central Asia)

Russia Region

Korean Studies in Russia began in earnest during the Imperial Russian era in 1884, when the two countries established diplomatic relations. However, research in Korean Studies truly took off from 1945, the year of the Korean Peninsula's liberation, through the 1980s. During this period, research in Korean Studies (centered on North Korean studies) was conducted across various fields (politics, economics, society, culture, language, history, etc.), including the compilation of Korean language dictionaries. Following the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1990, the addition of support from the South Korean government led to a new dimension of Korean Studies research. The foundation of Korean Studies in Russia lies in the Tsarist and Soviet eras; consequently, it can be said to have served as a major basis for the emergence and growth of Korean Studies in CIS countries outside of Russia following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The major universities leading Korean Studies in Russia are as follows:

Moscow State University. The university is actively engaged in Korean studies education and research, centered around the International Center for Korean Studies (ICFKS) under the Institute of

Asian and African Studies (IAAS), established by Professor Mikhail Pak in 1991. Research materials on Korean studies across various fields, such as the "Conference Proceedings" and the "Russian Series on Korean Studies," are being published. Furthermore, the Department of Korean Studies at Moscow State University has already published numerous Korean studies textbooks by authors including Mikhail Pak, Irina Kacatkina, Young-Woo Han, and In-Soon Jung (Kurbanov, 2018: 144-148).

St. Petersburg State University. Professional Korean language education at this university began in 1897, and more comprehensive education was initiated by Professor Koldovich in 1947. Korean history education also began around this time, but was suspended midway before resuming in 1997. The Center for Korean Language and Culture was established by Vasiliev A. in 1995 and expanded into the Interdisciplinary Research Institute for Korean Studies in 2013, where active research in Korean studies has been conducted. At the university, research in Korean studies is systematically carried out in all fields, from undergraduate to doctoral programs. In-depth research in Korean studies across all disciplines, including the Korean language, history, and literature, has been conducted by Professors such as Kurbanov O. and Tsoy I. Furthermore, a vast amount of research material on Korean studies has been published, and the 'Journal of the Center for Korean Language and Culture' has been regularly published (Kurbanov, 2018: 148-152).

Moscow State Linguistic University. At this university, research in Korean studies is conducted primarily through the Department of Korean Language, established in 1992. With approximately 60 students, in-depth research in the fields of Korean language, history, and literature is being carried out by professors such as E. Pokholkova and M. Soldatova, and numerous publications have been published (Kurbanov, 2018: 155-157).

In addition, Korean studies research has been conducted in earnest since the 1990s at the Higher School of Economics, the Russian State University for the Humanities, Novosibirsk State University, Irkutsk State University, Far Eastern Federal University, as well as the Institute of Oriental Studies (Moscow), the Institute of Far Eastern Studies (Moscow), and the Institute of Oriental Literature (St. Petersburg). Other institutions include the Moscow State University of International Relations, the

Russian State Herzen Pedagogical University, and Sakhalin State University.

As previously mentioned, the foundations for Korean Studies in the Russian region were laid as early as the Imperial Russian era, and significant research achievements have been accumulated throughout the Soviet period. Furthermore, with the commencement of exchanges with South Korea following the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, research centered on Korean Studies rather than North Korean Studies has been added, leading to the conduct of more in-depth Korean Studies. The volume of publications released by the Korean Studies academic community in Russia is regular and consistent, and their content is also profound. Korean Studies researchers in Russia take great pride in the fact that more substantial research has been conducted and numerous research results produced there than in any other region, and

they are building a Russian-style Korean studies environment.

Caucasus Region

Aside from Russia, the Caucasus region can be cited as a center for Korean studies. For reference, similar to the Russian region, it is assumed that the information regarding the infrastructure of Korean studies at the presented universities differs from the present. Korean studies in the Caucasus region began with the establishment of a Korean language course at the Azerbaijani Language University (1994, Azerbaijan). Subsequently, Korean studies expanded as Korean language courses were established at institutions such as the Free University of Tbilisi (2001, Georgia), the Yerevan State University of Languages and Social Sciences (2006, Armenia), and the Baku National University (2007, Azerbaijan).

Table 1

The major Korean studies universities in the Caucasus regions

(Dec. 2016)

University	Year	Faculty/ Department	Teaching staff (Korean/Local)	Undergraduate Students (Major/ Minor)	Country
Free University of Tbilisi	2001	Faculty of Asian and African Studies (Major in Far East Asian Studies)	1/1	29 (22/7)	Georgia
Yerevan State University of Languages and Social Sciences	2006/ 2014	Course Offering (Department of English-Korean Translation and Interpretation)	1/2	63 (14/49)	Armenia
Azerbaijani Language University	1994	Faculty of Translation and Interpretation	4/2	66 (36/30)	Azerbaijan
Baku National University	2007	Faculty of Oriental Studies	5/1	55 (40/15)	
Khazar University	2012	Faculty of Religious Studies/Faculty of Engineering/Faculty of Oriental Studies	/1	25	
Nakhchivan National University	2012	Faculty of International Relations (East Asian Studies)	/1	25	

*(Source: Korea Foundation, 『2018 White Paper on Overseas Korean Studies』, Eul-yu Publishing Co., 2018, pp. 171-173)

Except the Azerbaijani Language University (1994), Korean studies programs at most of the major universities presented began in the 2000s. This is later than in the Central Asian region, implying that the foundation for conducting Korean studies is still weak. The Caucasus region lags Central Asia in terms of teaching staff and students. The

number of students majoring in Korean studies is relatively small, and the size of the teaching staff is particularly limited. Even at the Azerbaijani Language University and Baku National University, which appear to have large teaching staff, Koreans constitute the majority of the teaching staff. The issue of training and producing professional local

lecturers is a challenge faced by all Korean studies universities in the Caucasus region. Meanwhile, except the Azerbaijani University, which offers a master's program, most other universities do not have graduate programs in Korean studies. The absence of graduate programs implies that in-depth research in Korean studies is not being conducted. Expanding the student and teaching staff sizes, establishing a Korean Studies major, and growing and expanding into a graduate school of Korean Studies are issues that are not easy to resolve in the short term. The only solution is for those working in the field to achieve these goals through patient effort.

Korean Studies Infrastructure and Education in Major Central Asian Countries

Current Status of Korean Studies Infrastructure Indicators in Central Asia

The Korean Studies research team at Al-Farabi KazNU collected information on Korean Studies infrastructure, focusing on universities related to Korean Studies in major Central Asian countries, during the first year of research (June 2025-May 2026) which began in June 2025 (see tables below). The following tables present the status of Korean Studies infrastructure at major universities in Central Asia where Korean Studies education and research activities, including the Korean language, are most actively conducted.

Table 2
Kazakhstan

(As of Dec. 2025)

University	Year	Faculty/ Department	Year	Teaching staff/ Student	Master's/ Doctoral Student	Graduate School	Remarks
Al-Farabi Kazakh National University	1934	Faculty of Oriental Studies/ Department of the Far East	1994	20/140	10	Yes	Major
Kazakh Ablai Khan University of International Relations and World Languages	1993	Faculty of Oriental Studies/ Department of Korean Studies	1999	22/368	8	Yes	Major
L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University	1998	Department of Oriental Studies	1999	3/170		No	Major
Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University	1928	Faculty of World Languages/ Department of Oriental Languages and Translation Studies	1990-2002	4/186	From 2027	Yes	Non-major/2021 (Reopening)
Suleiman Demirel University	1996	Education and Humanity Faculty, Two foreign language, Translation	2016	5/404		No	Non-major
Korkyt-Ata Kyzylorda University	1937	Faculty of Foreign Languages and Translation Studies-Department of English and Korean Languages	2003	1/380		No	Non-major
Sherkhan Murtaza International Taraz Innovative Institute	2008	Faculty of Foreign Languages	2013	1/73		No	Non-major
M. Kh. Dulaty Taraz Regional University	1998	Faculty of Humanities/ Department of World Languages		1/136		No	Non-major
Astana IT University	2019	Faculty of General Education	2024	1/100		No	Non-major

Continuation of the table

University	Year	Faculty/ Department	Year	Teaching staff/ Student	Master's/ Doctoral Student	Graduate School	Remarks
Maksut Narikbayev University	1994	Faculty of Humanities	2021	1/110		No	Non-major
Kazakh National Women's Teacher Training University	1944	Department of Foreign Language Education Methodology and Intercultural Communication	2023	3/133		No	Non-major
Satbayev Kazakh National Research Technical University	1934	Department of Foreign Languages	2024	2/70		No	Non-major
Almaty Management University	1988	KT & G Scholarship Foundation commissioned education (Korean Language Center)	2025	3/90		No	Non-major

* (Source: 2025-2026 Al-Farabi KazNU Seed Project Team-Information on Korean Studies in Kazakhstan)

Table 3
Uzbekistan

(As of Dec. 2025-Mar. 2026)

University	Year	Faculty/ Department	Year	Teaching staff/ Student	Master's/ Doctoral Student	Korean Studies Library	Korean club
Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies	1918	Faculty of Oriental Languages (Department of Korean Studies)	1991	32/377	14/5	Over 1,500 volumes	5
Uzbekistan state world language university	1949	Faculty of Korean Language and Literature	1995	33/847	24/6	2021 Over 15,000 vol.	3
Tashkent State Pedagogic University named after Nizami	1935	Department of Korean Language and Literature	1956/ 1985 (Reopened)	8/81	17/2	Over 1,000 vol.	3
Korean International University in Ferghana	2022	Faculty of Korean Language	2022	12/100		Over 500 vol.	2
AJOU University	2018	Faculty of Korean Philology and Management	2018	14/150	8/2		2
Korea International University of Technology		Department of Korean Philology	2009	22/790	27/	Over 1,000 vol.	7
Urgench State University	1992	Department of Korean Philology	2023	4/60			
Samarkand State University	1927	Korean Language and Culture Center	2019	4/50			
Andijan State Institute Of Foreign Languages	2022	Department of Korean Philology	2022	14/202	11/4	Over 1,000 vol.	3

Continuation of the table

University	Year	Faculty/ Department	Year	Teaching staff/ Student	Master's/ Doctoral Student	Korean Studies Library	Korean club
Bucheon University in Tashkent	2018	Faculty of Korean Language and Management	2020	8/60		2020	2
Samarkand International University of Technology	2022	Korean Language Major, School of Language and Literature and Foreign Language Educatio	2024	2/25		Over 250 vol.	3
Silk Road International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage	2018	Department of Translation and Interpretation (Korean)	2024	3	124		
TIFT University (Tashkent International University of Financial Management and Technologies)	2022	Department of Foreign Languages (Major in Korean Language and Literature)	2022	10	83		
Alfraganus University	2022	Faculty of Philology (Philology and language teaching "Korean language")	2022	3	40		

* (Source: 2025-2026 Al-Farabi KazNU Seed Project Team-Information on Korean Studies in Uzbekistan)

Table 4
Kyrgyzstan

(As of Dec. 2025)

University	Year	Faculty/ Department	Year	Teaching staff	Bachelor's/ Master's	Second foreign language	Graduate school	Korean Studies Library
Kyrgyz National University named after. J. Balasagyna	1925/1932	Institute of Foreign Languages/ Linguistics (Korean Language) Program	2016	5	120/	80	Master's program	Yes
Osh State University	1951	Institute of Oriental Studies/ Center for Korean Language and Culture	2010	5	192 (Including master's students)		Master's program	Yes
Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University named after B.N. Yeltsin	1993	The Korean Language and Culture Department at the Institute of World Civilizations and Languages	2001	4	70	50	Master's program	Yes

Continuation of the table

Bishkek State University named after K. Karasaev	1955	Faculty of Oriental Studies and International Relations/ Department of Korean Philology	1991/1996 (reopening)	9	220/1	39	Master's program	Yes
Korean Institute of Central Asia	2017	Department of Linguistics and Regional Studies	2017	3	80		Master's program	Yes
Kyrgyz State University named after.	1942	Faculty of Foreign Languages/Dept. of Foreign Languages	2000s	5	120	60	Master's program	

* (Source: 2025-2026 Al-Farabi KazNU Seed Project Team-Information on Korean Studies in Kyrgyzstan)

The table presented above illustrates the status of Korean studies infrastructure at major universities in Central Asia as of 2025. Although there are significant gaps in the collected information due to difficulties arising from local conditions, data is expected to be continuously supplemented through ongoing additional surveys. Furthermore, information on the infrastructure of Korean studies in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, where the scale of Korean studies (number of educational institutions) is small, has not been included. These countries are all newly independent nations that gained independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. Some of these universities established departments such as Korean language or Korean language and literature in the early to mid-1990s and have played a leading role in Korean studies, focusing on the Korean language, Korean history and culture, and Korean literature.

Let us examine the changes in Korean studies infrastructure over the past decade, focusing on representative Korean studies universities in each country.

First, in the case of Al-Farabi KazNU, a leading institution for Korean studies in Kazakhstan, the student body increased from 112 majors (105 bachelor's, 7 master's/doctoral) 10 years ago (2015-16 academic year) (Jang Ho-jong(1), 2018: 196) to approximately 150 majors (140 bachelor's, 10 master's/doctoral) as of 2025 (see Table 2). In terms of teaching staff size, the number remains around 20, similar to that of about 10 years ago. The increase is particularly significant in the case of KazUIR&WL, which has the largest number of Korean studies

majors. In the 2016-17 academic year, there were total 308 students (227 majors, 70 second foreign languages, and 11 master's or doctoral students) (Jang Ho-jong(1), 2018: 202-203); in the 2017-18 academic year, there were 312 students (248 majors, 64 second foreign languages, and 18 master's or doctoral students) (Jang Ho-jong(2), 2018: 139-140); and in the 2022-23 academic year, there were 389 students (379 majors and non-majors, and 10 master's or doctoral students) (Jang Ho-jong(3), 2023: 248). As of 2025, the total size stands at 368 students (including majors, second foreign languages, and master's or doctoral students), indicating a steady increase in student numbers without any decrease (see Table-2). Furthermore, the teaching staff size of the college in question has also consistently remained at around 20.

For reference, around 2007-a little over a decade earlier than the periods mentioned-the number of students in Korean language courses in Kazakhstan, centered around Al-Farabi KazNU and KazUIR&WL, exceeded 300, while the number of Korean language students at Korean Education Centers and other educational institutions reached approximately 1,000 (Kim German, 2007: 472). Al-Farabi KazNU and KazUIR&WL are noteworthy for having the largest scale in terms of both student and teaching staff numbers, offering Korean studies as a major, and possessing an academic structure where Korean studies education and research extend to master's and doctoral levels.

In Uzbekistan, representative Korean studies educational institutions include Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies and Uzbekistan state

world language university. It can be seen that the university's student body for the 2015-16 academic year consisted of 334 undergraduate students (274 majors, 60 second foreign languages) and 15 master's students (Jang Ho-jong(1), 2018: 200), and as of 2025, the scale remains consistent with 337 undergraduate students (including majors and second foreign languages) and 19 master's and doctoral students (see Table-3). In the case of the Uzbekistan state world language university, as of March 2026, it is similar to or ahead of Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies in terms of teaching staff and student numbers.

Let us look at the case of Bishkek State University named after K. Karasaev, a representative institution for Korean studies education in Kyrgyzstan. During the 2015-16 academic year, the student body consisted of 115 undergraduate majors and 5 master's and doctoral students (Jang Ho-jong(1), 2018: 198), and as of 2025, the total student body has increased to approximately 260 (220 majors, 39 second foreign languages, and 1 master's student) (see Table-4).

The Status of Korean Studies Education in Central Asia

This study examines the status of Korean studies education in the Central Asian region, focusing primarily on Kazakhstan, specifically through the cases of Al-Farabi KazNU and KazUIR&WL. This is because the two aforementioned universities provide the largest-scale major-level Korean studies education within Central Asia (whereas most other universities, excluding the two mentioned and the National University of Eurasia, offer Korean as a second language on a non-major basis), and also because the educational environments of universities in Central Asia share many similarities due to their past affiliation with the Soviet Union.

Academic System. Within universities dealing with languages (Faculties of Oriental Studies), education is subdivided into three majors-including Korean Studies-namely, Interpretation and Translation (focused on interpretation and translation), Oriental Studies (focused on history), and Language and Literature (focused on literature) (the same applies to graduate programs). This initiative stems from a national program for fostering field-specific experts and promoting educational development, aiming to move away from a one-sided focus on language education and cultivate specialized professionals starting from the undergraduate level.

Student and teaching staff. Al-Farabi KazNU admits 30 to 50 new students annually, while KazUIR&WL has a larger scale. Additionally, due to the absence of an admission quota system, there are significant differences in student numbers across departments. Furthermore, around 10 prospective researchers are enrolling in graduate master's and doctoral programs. In terms of teaching staff, both universities typically maintain a teaching staff of around 20. More than half of them are responsible for Korean language education; however, compared to Korean language instruction, the teaching staff and class hours for history, culture, literature, and economics are relatively insufficient.

Master's and Doctoral Programs. At Al-Farabi KazNU and KazUIR&WL, an official academic system is established that allows Korean studies education to continue from the undergraduate level through the master's and doctoral programs. For those aspiring to become researchers, an academic system is in place that enables graduate studies and degree attainment following the same organizational structure as their undergraduate studies (depending on their specific major).

Exchange Student/Dual Degree Programs. Al-Farabi KazNU has signed approximately 40 exchange agreements with major universities in Korea. Every semester, about 15 to 20 students participate in exchange student programs (one or two semesters) or dual degree programs (one or two-year courses: Bachelor's and Master's) at partner universities in Korea (such as Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Dongguk University, Sookmyung Women's University, Kookmin University, Pusan National University of Foreign Studies, Kangnam University, and Gangneung-Wonju National University) to practice the Korean language. Particularly, the exchange student programs during the undergraduate period serve as a crucial opportunity to enhance students' Korean language skills and experience Korean history and culture.

Scholarship System. At Al-Farabi KazNU, 60–70% of incoming students enter as four-year government-funded scholarship recipients. For graduate master's and doctoral programs, excluding international students, 100% of students study as government-funded scholarship recipients. In addition, there are scholarships and departmental support funds provided by Korea. The university receives scholarships and sponsorship funds for Korean studies events (competitions, Olympiads, Korean Studies Week, etc.) from Korean Associations and companies op-

erating in Kazakhstan (such as Korea Association of Small and Medium Business in Kazakhstan, Association of Korean Commercial Companies in Almaty and Shinhan Bank Kazakhstan), Korean companies and private organizations, and Korean government agencies (such as the Korea Foundation and Korean Education Center in Almaty). This greatly helps to inspire motivation and enhance the interest and passion of Korean studies majors.

Status of Korean Studies Research in Central Asia

Korean studies research in Central Asia has also been steadily growing. Based on the academic journal (Korean Studies in Kazakhstan), which professionally publishes the largest number of Korean studies research results in Central Asia, the status of Korean studies research over the past five years (2020-2025) is as follows.

Table 5
Current Status of Korean Studies Research Outcomes

Field	Number of published papers					Total
	2020	2022	2023	2024	2025	
Language Field	18	18	20	20	11	87
History/ Culture, etc.	11	23	21	29	26	110
Literature Field	1	1	5	1	2	10
Total	30	42	46	50	39	207

*(Source: *Korean Studies in Kazakhstan*). Information for 2021 has been omitted due to missing data.

As shown in the table above, total 207 research papers were published in the cited academic journals over the past five years. These papers cover the fields of the Korean language, Korean history and culture (politics, economics, society, etc.), and Korean literature. Even looking at the data as of 2020, it is evident that the quantity of publications in all fields has steadily increased. However, an interesting point emerges when examining the breakdown by field: research papers in the history and culture sector (110 papers) are the most numerous, followed by the linguistics(87) and literature sectors(10).

There are two aspects worth noting here. First, the number of research papers in non-linguistic fields-specifically history and culture-has actually surpassed that of the linguistics sector. This is a significant point considering the current state of Korean studies education within universities, where the Korean language sector accounts for an overwhelmingly large number of teaching staff and teaching hours. This can be evaluated very positively, as it indicates that the educational emphasis and interest in fields such as history and culture have increased to the point where they are comparable to those in the linguistics sector, leading to significant research outcomes. Secondly, on the other hand, the output

of research in the field of literature is relatively low. Looking at the educational landscape of universities offering Korean studies, personnel who have formally majored in Korean literature are very rare, and those holding doctoral degrees are even harder to find. Furthermore, the number of class hours dedicated to literature is relatively low, resulting in a severe imbalance between the fields of language, history/culture, and literature. Therefore, while immediate improvement is realistically difficult, it is necessary to gradually improve the situation over time.

Results and discussion

Central Asia is a region where the Hallyu (Korean Wave) is very strong and interest in and popularity for Korea and Korean culture are very high. Over the past 30 years, cooperation and exchange between the two countries have been actively conducted, particularly in the fields of economy, culture, and education. Furthermore, many international students and individuals from Central Asia are studying or engaging in economic activities in Korea. All of these factors contribute significantly to promoting friendly relations between the two na-

tions and further enhancing interest in the Korean language and Korean studies. Based on the experience in the field of education in Kazakhstan over the past decade, it is expected that interest and enthusiasm for the Korean language and Korean studies will continue unless specific problems arise. The author believes that the table presented earlier also allows us to anticipate a positive future for Korean studies in Central Asia.

However, while there are such positive systems and benefits, there are also difficulties that require deep consideration and discussion for fundamental resolution.

The first is the issue of securing excellent next-generation teaching staff. Actually, this is one of the structural problems faced by most universities in Central Asia and can be attributed to low salary conditions. For instance, the reality is that highly skilled professionals who have completed master's or doctoral programs domestically or abroad rarely return to their alma mater's Korean studies department, making it difficult to secure excellent personnel.

Secondly, there is a frequent phenomenon of existing excellent teaching staff leaving. This can fundamentally be attributed to low salary levels, which acts as a factor driving top teaching staff to leave for universities or Korean studies departments with even slightly better conditions. Consequently, this situation leads to a decline in teaching staff morale and motivation, as well as a drop in the quality of instruction, acting as a comprehensive challenge for the field of Korean studies.

Finally, the author believes it is necessary to seriously consider the issues of training and expanding specialized personnel in fields other than the Korean language (such as history, literature, and economics), as well as increasing teaching hours. For instance, though Korean studies education has been in place for well over 30 years, Korean-language-centered education remains the dominant focus in the field, while the scale of specialized personnel in non-Korean fields and the teaching hours are relatively highly imbalanced. This is because while there are personnel who teach the Korean language 'in Korean,' it is extremely difficult to find personnel who can teach Korean history and literature 'in Korean.'

Conclusion

Since the independence of Central Asian countries in the early 1990s, Korean language and Kore-

an studies education has been successfully conducted. As shown in the tables presented earlier, Korean studies have grown and developed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Particularly, in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan, the number of universities and educational institutions offering Korean language education continues to increase; although there are differences in scale and educational fields, Kazakhstan alone has well over 10 such institutions. The status and popularity of Korean studies in Central Asia are very high. Many people like Korea and have an affinity for the Korean language, wishing to study it. The Korean Education Center in Almaty recruits students twice a year, and it is reported that 2,000 to 3,000 students register during these sessions. This is undeniably a massive scale. At this juncture, there is a need to look back on the growth and development of the Korean language and Korean studies to date and to consider future directions for development.

The author is focusing on whether there are ways to enhance the current status of the Korean language in Kazakhstan, a multi-ethnic nation. For instance, if Korean were to be adopted as a second foreign language, it would immediately provide majors with expanded opportunities for employment after graduation. If students who have studied Korean studies could confidently work as Korean language teachers in elementary, middle, and high schools rather than just general companies, The author believes this would likely lead to ideal employment outcomes. While there are several challenges that must be overcome to elevate the official status and standing of the Korean language, The author would like to conclude this essay with a few suggestions.

First, continuous contact and efforts at the government level are necessary to adopt Korean as a second foreign language.

As a prerequisite, it is crucial to ensure that Korean is adopted as a second foreign language through continuous contact at the government level (working-level contact) between the two countries. Alternatively, it is necessary to create a situation where the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan shows interest and support, either by granting Korean a status equivalent to a second foreign language or by enabling official Korean language education. Unless such prerequisite measures or equivalent conditions are established, it will be difficult to secure institutional justification and legitimacy for introducing additional Korean lan-

guage pedagogy curricula or securing specialized personnel for training Korean language teachers, even within Korean language departments.

Secondly, it is necessary to consider the additional introduction of a pedagogy curriculum for training Korean language teachers.

If a certain level of agreement is reached at the government level between the two sides, the next step would be to introduce a curriculum related to Korean language pedagogy and teacher training within Korean language departments at universities. Currently, there are about 10 Korean language educational institutions in Kazakhstan, including Al-Farabi KazNU and KazUIR&WL. However, a pedagogy curriculum for training Korean language teachers has not been introduced. Of course, this may be because a teacher certification exam (National examination) is not required for teacher training, unlike in Korea. In any case, if an agreement can be reached between the governments, it is judged that a curriculum for training Korean lan-

guage teachers could be additionally introduced to frontline Korean language departments under legal and institutional justification.

Finally, the goal is to establish a teacher training system by reinforcing the professional workforce in the field of pedagogy.

Just as important as introducing additional curriculum for teacher training is establishing a teacher training system by securing the professional personnel capable of training candidates for teacher certification. Currently, there is a shortage of professionals in the Kazakhstani education sector who can teach Korean language teacher training programs or pedagogical subjects in the field of Korean language education (such as pedagogical theory and practice).

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